

**Refracted Communications: Multilingualism and (Im)Purity in the Works of Maria-Mercè  
Marçal and Julia Fiedorczuk**

Aleksandra Gocławska

Lucy Cavendish College

University of Cambridge

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This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

## **Refracted Communications: Multilingualism and (Im)Purity in the Works of Maria-Mercè Marçal and Julia Fiedorczuk**

**Aleksandra Gocławska**

### **Abstract**

This dissertation explores the multilingual poetics of hospitality in the works of Maria-Mercè Marçal (1952-1958), who wrote in Catalan, and Julia Fiedorczuk (born in 1975), who writes in Polish. Multilingualism, for Marçal and Fiedorczuk, will not only refer to the presence of multiple languages in a literary text, but also to translation; it also means a mixing of dialects and argots with the normative versions of Polish and Catalan and includes the mixing of different symbolic structures that regulate communication, such as the expression of gender, skin color or class belonging. Chapter One provides an outline of the ties between the nation, national language, and family in Polish and Catalan contexts; it also engages with texts by Marçal and Fiedorczuk that inform and potentially destabilize the traditionally gendered roles within the national community, metaphorized as family. I point to the historical perilousness of the patriarchal understanding of the nation as ‘the country of men,’ and of the romanticized Nature as woman (the latter, I argue, acquires an especially dangerous dimension given the on-going, global environmental crisis). In Chapter Three, I explore some alternative versions of nationalism or patriotism in alignment with the ecofeminist and transnational writing practice of both authors. Marçal complicates the links between motherhood and language; she also reworks the myth of the dragon and Sant Jordi, pointing to the ties between patriarchy and anthropocentrism. For Fiedorczuk, the links between poetry and spirituality give rise to an abstract notion of Fatherland, which needs to be replaced with the care for the cleanliness of the air, seas, and rivers, leading to an understanding of community founded upon inter-species solidarity. In Chapter Three, Marçal and Fiedorczuk appear in their role as translators. In the chapter, rather than offering a critique of Marçal’s and Fiedorczuk’s translations, I sketch the visions of the translator’s task that shine through Fiedorczuk’s and Marçal’s translation strategies. Fiedorczuk analyzes translations in the context of representation of the non-human world and sees translation and writing as part and parcel of the same process: ecopoetic interbeing, by which she understands the making of a home through language. Marçal’s focus is on musicality, sound, and dialogue, which remain linked to her understanding of writing and translating as passion. In Chapter Four I look at the importance of translation as metaphor in Marçal’s and Fiedorczuk’s writing. Chapter Five contains close readings of fragments of Fiedorczuk’s and Marçal’s prose, focusing on language mixing, the definition of language border and linguistic and cultural ‘outsiders.’ For Marçal, boundary-crossing is a metaphor for inter-human and inter-textual, passionate relationships, which are often germane to translation. For her part, Fiedorczuk understands writing as an ecopoetic issue, as the creation of a home in which both the human ‘outsiders’ and the non-humans will thrive.



There's enormity in a hair  
Enough to lead men not to share  
Narrow confines of a sphere  
But put an ocean or a fence  
Between two opposite intents.  
A hair would span the difference.

—Adrienne Rich (1984)



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## Introduction

My initial idea in focusing on multilingualism in Maria-Mercè Marçal and Julia Fiedorczuk stemmed from a need to seek innovative paths in comparative literature. I believe that, to borrow Emily Apter's words, '[w]hile it has become commonplace [...] to bemoan the hegemony of global English as the lingua franca of technocracy, there has been insufficient attention paid to how other global languages are shifting the balance of power in the production of world culture.'<sup>1</sup> I decided to work on a Polish and a Catalan writer to counter this tendency and foster unusual comparative combinations, in this case, of two strong, feminist voices of writers who were born into two languages and nations with complex histories of oppression, multicultural cohabitation, and troubled nationalism. In their work, Marçal and Fiedorczuk engage with their respective discourses of national affirmation and survival from feminist, queer, multilingual, and environmentalist perspectives. In spite of the casual consensus that feminism and nationalism lay on two opposite sides of the political spectrum, both authors, while questioning the heteropatriarchal, monolingual, and anthropocentric foundations of their respective cultural canons, are invested in the nation. If Marçal and Fiedorczuk approach the nation, it is to seek multilingual and cross-species alliances.

The discursive and affective conditions under which the national, the normative, can be *worked*, or *worked on*, will differ in the context of the post-communist and contemporary Poland, in which Fiedorczuk writes, and the post-Francoist Catalonia and Spain, in which Marçal's work is situated. Fiedorczuk, born in 1975, experienced the last years of the Soviet regime in Poland and the subsequent political transition as a child. In 1975, the Francoist regime fell in Spain and Catalonia following the death of Franco – Marçal was 23 years old then and already engaged in exploring Catalan literature. In 1989, when the Polish Round Table Talks were carried out in Poland, which led to the final abolition of communism in Poland and made the transition to a free and democratic Poland possible, Fiedorczuk was in primary school. Neither of the authors explicitly engage their experience of the political regimes they witnessed in early youth, yet they do respond to the narratives of minoritized nation that developed both in Poland and Catalonia as a result of political violence and cultural oppression.

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 3.

Fiedorczuk is featured in anthologies, usually in the Polish context and among other (especially ‘young,’ i.e. not yet established) women writers.<sup>2</sup> Her literary work is difficult to situate within the realm of one language: it contains a startling corpus of hybrid references to science, to North American Modernism and Postmodernism, to Polish and North American Romanticism, Polish contemporary and post-war literature, Latin American Modernists, the Bible, among many other. She is most often associated with ecopoetics, an inherently transnational movement (although still predominantly theorized in English, a tendency that Fiedorczuk is attempting to change). There is no critical analysis of Fiedorczuk’s work published as a book, neither in Polish nor in any other language. There are, however, articles and unpublished MA theses<sup>3</sup> dedicated to the author’s work, written mainly in Polish, some of which I refer to in this dissertation. The theoretical framework within which Fiedorczuk is usually situated is mostly relevant to the studies of feminism, Modernism, corporeality, and ecocriticism. For instance, in ‘Konstelacje neoawangardy w poezji kobiet na przykładzie twórczości Julii Fiedorczuk,’<sup>4</sup> Joanna Grądziel-Wójcik analyzes Fiedorczuk’s impact in re-fashioning the avant-garde, which, in the Polish context, has consistently overlooked women’s poetry. She also explores the links between feminism and ecology in Fiedorczuk’s work.<sup>5</sup> For her part, Anna

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<sup>2</sup> In English, it is worth mentioning *Ambers Aglow: An Anthology of Contemporary Polish Women’s Poetry*, ed. and trans. by Regina Grol (Austin: Host Publications, 2006). More recent anthologies of Polish women poets featuring Fiedorczuk include *Solistki: Antologia poezji kobiet (1989-2009)* (Warszawa: Staromiejski Dom Kultury, 2009), ed. by Maria Cyranowicz, Joanna Mueller, Justyna Radczyńska and *Warkoczami: Antologia nowej poezji* (Warszawa: Staromiejski Dom Kultury, 2016), both anthologies of young women poets in Polish, the publication of which was carried out by Polish women poets. The most recent anthology that includes Fiedorczuk among women poets in Polish was just published this year in Spanish: *Luz que fue sombra: Diecisiete poetas polacas (1963-1981)*, bilingual edition, ed. and trans. by Gerardo Beltrán and Abel Murcia (Madrid: Vaso roto, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> An especially interesting example, relevant to the topic of depicting trauma, which I discuss in much less detail in Chapter One, is *Miedzy doświadczeniem somatycznym a mimesis życia wewnętrznego. Proza Justyny Bargielskiej i Julii Fiedorczuk* (‘Between the somatic experience and mimesis of inner life. The Prose of Justyna Bargielska and Julia Fiedorczuk’) by Aleksandra Byrska, written under the supervision of Jarosław Fazan and defended in 2014. Here Fiedorczuk is compared to Polish contemporary writer Justyna Bargielska. In another comparative study that includes Fiedorczuk, Anna Zygmunt explores the topic of childlessness in Polish women writers. Her MA thesis titled *Kobieca bezdzietność w prozie polskiej po 1989 roku* (‘Female childlessness in Polish prose published after 1989’), under the supervision of Anna Łebkowska, was also defended in 2019. Another comparative study including Fiedorczuk is *Władza, wygląd, rytuał - bohaterki polskiej prozy kobiecej ostatnich lat w kontekście socjologii ciała* (‘Power, appearance, ritual - female characters in the latest Polish women’s novels in the context of the sociology of the body’) written by Aleksandra Sikora under the supervision of Aleksander Fiut and defended in 2014. All MA theses were written at the Faculty of Polish of the Jagiellonian University and all of them situate Fiedorczuk in the Polish and feminist context.

<sup>4</sup> Joanna Grądziel-Wójcik, ‘Konstelacje neoawangardy w poezji kobiet na przykładzie twórczości Julii Fiedorczuk,’ *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich*, LXI, vol. 2 (2018). <<http://czasopisma.ltn.lodz.pl/index.php/Zagadnienia-Rodzajow-Literackich/article/view/394>> [accessed: 11 June 2021]

<sup>5</sup> Joanna Grądziel-Wójcik, ‘“Instrukcje obsługi kobiety i świata”: O (eko)poezji Julii Fiedorczuk,’ *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne*, 33, October 2018, pp. 237-53.

Węgrzyniak explores ecopoetic metaphors in Fiedorczuk's poetry, pointing to the painful awareness of the ecological crisis that cannot be separated from Fiedorczuk's acknowledgement of the materiality of meaning.<sup>6</sup> Ilona Klimek approaches Fiedorczuk's prose from a psychoanalytical perspective, focusing on the abjection of womanhood and on repulsion.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Dominika Stefańska also looks at defining womanhood, although she reads Fiedorczuk's short stories from the perspective of cognitive linguistics.<sup>8</sup> If Fiedorczuk is compared to other authors, it is usually within her linguistic realm, or within the academic disciplines that she represents and promotes.

Similarly, Marçal is usually discussed in academic studies in comparison to other Catalan-speaking or Spanish-speaking, usually women authors, although of course the corpus of critical work on Marçal is much vaster than on Fiedorczuk, and still growing. It would be impossible to enumerate here all articles regarding the Catalan's poet work. Some examples of comparative studies that include Marçal include *Mosaico ibérico: ensayos sobre poesía y diversidad* edited by Joana Sabadell Nieto.<sup>9</sup> Studies in English such as Noelia Díaz Vicedo's *Constructing feminine poetics in the works of a late-20th-century woman poet: Maria-Mercè Marçal* and the most recent, comparative work *Queer Genealogies in Transnational Barcelona: Maria-Mercè Marçal, Cristina Peri Rossi, and Flavia Company* by Natasha Tanna have contributed to increase access to the debates on Marçal's work for readers who do not speak Catalan.<sup>10</sup> When it comes to poetic anthologies, Caterina Riba<sup>11</sup> mentions some of the books that gather women poets, all of which situate Marçal in the Iberian or specifically Catalan context.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Anna Węgrzyniak, "“Oddycham więc jestem”: Poezja Julii Fiedorczuk," *Białostockie Studia Literaturoznawcze* (9/2016). See also: Anna Węgrzyniak, "Ćwiczenie ekologicznej wyobraźni: O poezji Julii Fiedorczuk," *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne*, vol 33 (2018): "(Nie)opisane. Poetki polskie XX i XXI wieku (part II)." <https://pressto.amu.edu.pl/index.php/pspsl/article/view/15927> [accessed 11 June 2021]

<sup>7</sup> Ilona Klimek, "“Być mięsem, a stawać się światłem”: Wstręt jako sposób konstruowania kobiecej podmiotowości w Poranku Marii i innych opowiadaniach Julii Fiedorczuk," *Ruch Literacki*, LVIII, 2017, vol. 3 (342).

<sup>8</sup> Dominika Stefańska, "O zmianach w definiowaniu kobiecości na przykładzie wybranych opowiadań Julii Fiedorczuk," in *Bogactwo polszczyzny w świetle jej historii*, ed. by J. Przyklenk, W. Wilczek, Vol. 6 (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2016), pp. 149-158.

<sup>9</sup> *Mosaico ibérico: ensayos sobre poesía y diversidad*, ed. by Joana Sabadell Nieto (Madrid: Ediciones Júcar, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Natasha Tanna, *Queer Genealogies in Transnational Barcelona: Maria-Mercè Marçal, Cristina Peri Rossi, and Flavia Company*, Studies in Hispanic and Lusophone Cultures, 37 (Cambridge: Legenda, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> Caterina Riba, *Maria-Mercè Marçal: L'escriptura permeable* (Barcelona: Eumo Editorial, 2014), pp. 33-34.

<sup>12</sup> *Les cinc branques: Poesia femenina catalana*, ed. by Albert Esteve, Roser Matheu, Octavi Saltor, Antoni Sala-Cornadó i Maria Assumpció Torras (Engordany: Esteve Albert i Corp, 1975), *Contemporànies. Antologia de poetes dels Països Catalans*, ed. by Vinyet Panyella (Tarragona: El Mèdol, 1999), *Segle 21. Vint-i-una i una poetes per al segle vint-i-u*, ed. by Àlicia Beltran and Pere Perelló (Palma: Centre Cultural Capaltard, 2001), *Antologia de poesia catalana femenina*, ed. by Carme Riera (Barcelona: Mediterrànea, 2003), *Eròtiques i despentinades: un recorregut de cent anys per la poesia catalana amb veu de dona*, ed. by Encarna Sant-Celoni (Tarragona: Arola Editors, 2008),

However, there is a need to include Marçal's literary legacy in the debates on feminism, nation, and language that exceed the Iberian cultural realm not only by writing about her in English, but also by putting her to dialogue with likeminded authors who write in other languages.

What is missing is a bigger amount of comparative analyses of both Fiedorczuk's and Marçal's outside of their usual contexts. This study, which juxtaposes and compares a writer in Romance language and in a Slavonic language, is an attempt to overcome the constraints of language and nation which often define and delimit the reception of both authors' contributions to the debate on feminism. It is also aimed at promoting a wider perspective to think about nation and national minoritization in literature, by comparing two multilingual writers beyond the 'families' or restricted areas of influence defined as the Romance or Slavonic cultural production.

The presence of various languages, codes, and registers in a seemingly monolingual text at once informs and transforms the status of the main language. Insofar as a literary text defines the boundaries that delimit the scope of familiar languages but also of familiar references, language mixing, translation and cross-lingual references in literature can be studied as both familiarizing and defamiliarizing devices. Depending on its modes of application, multilingual insertions or intertextuality, contribute to (re)creating a 'family', a cluster of concepts and associations that are readable as 'homely,' as familiar or 'foreign' —unfamiliar or defamiliarizing— by the community of readers. It is the insistent image of a 'family' of language speakers, implicitly present in the nation. As we will see, "language" for Fiedorczuk and Marçal does not only refer to codified systems of signs, but also to symbolic clusters tied not only to imagined communities such as "nation" but also to different identity categories such as class, sexuality, or gender. These other kinds of "languages" and symbolic clusters remain entangled in the tensions between what is homogenous and complex, universal and particular, familiar and foreign. Rather than pursuing a vision of the nation based on linguistic or ethnic purity, both writers are interested in exploring the inner entanglements and identity intersections that are present in their respective languages and cultures, focusing on the hospitality (and the lack thereof) of the literary language.

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*Quàntiques! 10 poètes joves en diferencial femení* (Barcelona: QUARKpoesia, 2008), and *El poder del cuerpo: antología de poesía femenina contemporánea*, ed. by Meri Torras (Madrid: Castalia, 2009), with poems in Catalan, Basc, Galician, and Spanish.

## Hospitable Literatures? Writing on Languages and Homes.

Marçal grew up writing in Spanish. She attended a school that her biographer Lluïsa Julià describes as

franquista i represiva. Era una escola unitària que es dividia en tres nivells i entre nois i noies. [...] Els mestres que van arribar eren forans i no sabien el català. L'estudi era totalment memorístic. Feien concursos de qui se sabia millor el catequisme. [...] L'escola també era un punt de control ferri de la societat, estretament lligada a la església. [...] Els diumenges els guàrdies civils passaven per les cases per assegurar-se que la gent no treballava i assistia al ofici religiós. També els diumenges les criatures s'aplegaven a l'escola per anar junts a missa, els nens i les nenes en files separades i els mestres dirigint la comitiva.<sup>13</sup>

[Francoist and repressive. It was a small, rural school, divided in three levels and into boys and girls [...] The teachers who arrived where from outside and did know Catalan. The learning was entirely based on memorizing. There were competitions in the knowledge of Catechism. [...] The school, closely related to the Church, was also a means of tough control of the society. [...] On Sundays the civil guards checked the houses to make sure people were not working and that they were attending the mass. Every Sunday pupils gathered at schools to go to the mass together, with boys and girls forming separate rows and teachers overlooking the gathering.]<sup>14</sup>

The imposed presence of Catholic religion and of the Spanish language is described by Julià as the two factors of oppression that accompanied Marçal since early childhood, just like Fiedorczuk's very early youth was accompanied by the anti-Religious, Communist ideology. Marçal's poetic identity was also developing in the conditions of state-controlled repression of the language she spoke at home and the one she later chose as her literary tool, and of the imposition of conservative rules regarding religion and gender. In this she is different than Fiedorczuk, who begun to write already in a democratic Poland.

Although born in Barcelona, Marçal has always considered that she was from Ivars d'Urgell, where she grew up, as she explains in the autobiographical essay 'Viratges, reminiscències.'<sup>15</sup> Many of Marçal's earliest memories revolve around the image of travelling, of moving house. She writes:

<sup>13</sup> Lluïsa Julià, *Maria-Mercè Marçal: Una vida* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2017), pp. 36-37.

<sup>14</sup> Unless stated otherwise, all translations in this dissertation are mine.

<sup>15</sup> Maria-Mercè Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (Barcelona: Comanegra, 2020), p. 36.



El meu primer record [...] evoca un traslat de casa: una mudança. Només dues imatges: algú, potser el meu pare, feia entrar dins una saca, per endur-se'l, un gat que miolava i s'hi resistia. La meva mare plorava. Curiosament, en grec, el mot per dir trasllat, mudança, és *metàfora*. Un caprici lingüístic, potser irònic, lliga el meu primer record amb la poesia.<sup>16</sup>

[My first memory [...] evokes the moving of a house: a relocation. Only two images: someone, maybe my father, was making a cat enter into a sack, so that he could take it away; the cat meowed and resisted. My mother cried. Curiously enough, in Greek, a word to say move, relocation, is *metaphor*. A linguistic whim, maybe ironic, links my first memory to poetry.]

Jokingly, Marçal associates her condition of a poet with her 'tarannà nòmada'<sup>17</sup> ('nomad personality'), as if suggesting the impossibility of a definite and single sense of belonging. The initial journey from her family mansion in Ivars d'Urgell to a nearby village was marked by a family conflict, and the need to move down the ladder of class privilege, as her father, expelled from the house by his older brother, who inherited the land, was forced to start working as a day laborer after years of living the life of a land owner.<sup>18</sup> The right to own of the land, the spatial limits that it represents, in this sense, become representative of the first symbolic boundary or border of social class, which she crosses and questions. This symbolic story of origin as tied to nomadism also reflects the way in which Marçal positioned herself within the literary canon, as a traveler, a guest, facing the precarity of writing as a woman from a small town in the world of poetry, ruled by cultured men. The image that Marçal paints in her first memory is that of helplessness and disempowerment: a man, which Marçal associates with her father, and which could perhaps refer to patriarchal power, pushes a crying animal into a sack. A woman who witnesses the scene is crying too, both paining the image of patriarchal and anthropocentric domination. By evoking this image, not only does Marçal link her personal experience to poetry, but she also underlines the inevitably political dimension of the personal.

In her poetry, prose, as well as in her memories, Marçal invites the reader to participate in her personal life out of which her literature was born. While assuming the position of a 'stranger in the country of the poets' (an expression borrowed from Fiedorczuk), she also strives to make the Catalan canon more homely, more hospitable to women, animals, and other others. Marçal spoke of the Catalan 'homelessness' when referring to the work of J. V. Foix, a dear reference

<sup>16</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2020), p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2020), p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> See: Julià, pp. 28-31.

for her. In a note preserved in Marçal's archive in the National Library of Catalonia, the poet expresses her admiration for the poet's work: 'Manllevant-li els mots al mateix Foix, trobar la seva poesia va ser com "donar la cara, a frec de casa mateix, a un infinit curull de prodigis i de miracles latents"'<sup>19</sup> ('To borrow Foix's own words, finding his poetry felt like "confronting the infinite, overflowing with wonders and with latent miracles, just beside one's own home."') Marçal later explains her astonishment: she was amazed by the embrace of 'home' that Foix made possible, a home in language and literature, for a nation that had felt 'homeless,' silenced, oppressed. Foix, who lived through the most transformative and violent events of the twentieth century in Catalonia, provided valuable resources to understand and poeticize resistance. Marçal describes reading Foix during the Francoist period as an 'experiència de trasbals i d'alliberament, l'obra de Foix ens sorprengué en un moment d'indigència radical, a l'eixida d'uns anys en què pertot "es parlava estrany i les terres eren d'altri"'<sup>20</sup> ('experience of confusion and liberation; Foix's work surprised us at a moment of radical homelessness, at the peak of the years when "a strange language was spoken everywhere and the land belonged to others."')

The poet herself rarely references her experience of the dictatorship. She went to secondary school in Lleida, a city that she will later describe as 'la pila del seu batejament polític.'<sup>21</sup> According to Julià, in 1963 when Marçal got there, the city was sad and oppressed, full of soldiers walking down from the castle, turned into a military station. Franco had just visited the city and the death sentences were used abundantly; two young boys have just been executed by garroting for having placed bombs in Madrid which did not cause any damage.<sup>22</sup> In Lleida Marçal experienced for the first time the *Nova Cançó* phenomenon: the proliferation of protest songs that expressed Catalan belonging. (In fact, one of the most famous protest songs in Catalan, Lluís Llach's 'L'estaca,' 'Stake,' was adapted to Polish twenty years later by Jacek Kaczmarski as 'Mury,' 'Walls,' and sung as a manifesto against Communism during the workers' strikes in the eighties. Fiedorczuk was a teenager at the time.)

Marçal went to concerts of Setze Jutges, listened to records by Raimon, but also by Bob Dylan, she attended happenings and anti-Francoist demonstrations. She started reading Joaquim Vergader, Joan Maragall, Salvador Espriu. This is when she started writing poetry in Catalan

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<sup>19</sup> Fons Maria Mercè Marçal in the National Library of Catalonia (henceforth FMMM), box no. 14, folder no. 1. I was not able to find the reference to the quote from Foix.

<sup>20</sup> FMMM, box no. 14, folder no. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Julià, p. 41.

<sup>22</sup> Julià, pp. 41-42.

instead of Spanish.<sup>23</sup> In 1969, the poet arrived to Barcelona, where she stayed until her death, often moving house, trying to live off scholarships and odd jobs to be able to pay the bills and write. She studies Classics at the University of Barcelona and takes advantage of the *esclatxa* (a period of relative relaxation of Francoist oppression beginning in the late sixties and until his death in 1975) to also enroll in some of subjects at the newly open Catalan Studies. At the university, Marçal discovers the poetry of Carles Riba that impacted her deeply as his writing combined her two passions: ancient Greek and Latin references and Catalan.

Estranged from the mainstream Spanish culture of the time, the poet openly identifies with the Catalan nation, most likely in opposition to Spanish nationalism, especially in its fascist, Francoist version. Probably the most cited verse by the Catalan poet, which opens her first published collection of poems, is a statement of Marçal's feminist, working-class, and Catalan self-identification. In her famous *divisa*, or emblem, Marçal gives thanks to fortune for 'haver nascut dona, de classe baixa i nació oprimida'<sup>24</sup> ('having been born a women, working-class and of an oppressed nation.')

Marçal thus initiates her literary career with a proclamation of national belonging, feminism and working-class sensitivity. Originally, *divisa*, as a heraldic symbol, refers to 'an emblematic figure with a sentence or a concise slogan that explains it, used especially to express the sign that the person adopts or a specific concept,' yet Marçal's *divisa* does not contain a visual element.<sup>25</sup> It is a textual sign which implicitly evokes the chivalric code, with its aristocratic and patriarchal connotations, only to twist it and defy it using its own symbolic language. In her *divisa*, Marçal proclaims the minoritized status of Catalan —and the status of Catalan speakers as a nation— and immediately afterwards she speaks of the silencing of women and the working class in literature, thus pointing to questions of multiple minoritization as a woman writer (later also as a lesbian, a single mother, a woman with cancer who writes openly about her experience). From the onset, Marçal situates herself on the border, exploring the margins:

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Maria-Mercè Marçal, *Llengua abolida. Poesia completa 1973-1998* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2017), p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> 'divisa' in *Diccionari de l'Institut d'Estudis Catalans* <<http://www.diccionari.cat/lexicx.jsp?GECART=0046806>> [accessed 2 April 2010]

Tentinejant sobre l'estreta paret imperceptible que separa els espais acotats de la terra de ningú que queda en els marges... Cercant recers coixos i efímers, a cobert de l'ull que proscriu i del mot que coarta. O del silenci que agredeix, de sotamà.<sup>26</sup>

[Toddling over the narrow, unperceivable wall that separates the mapped spaces from the land of no one that is left on the margins... Searching for clumsy and ephemeral refuges from the eye that forbids and from the word that restricts. Or from the secret aggressions of silence.]

Marçal settled in the Catalan capital, but kept travelling, not only physically, but also metaphorically, venturing into different languages and literary traditions, as if a permanent wanderer, a guest in Barcelona, yet an active participant in Catalan literary circles and in political activism. In the final years of the Franco dictatorship she joined the PSAN (Socialist Party of National Liberation) and participated in the Assembly of Catalonia, an entity of anti-Francoist opposition created in 1971 under the slogan of 'Llibertat, Autonomia, Estatut d'Autonomia' ('freedom', in reference to restoring democratic practices, 'amnesty,' as the Assembly demanded freeing political prisoners, and 'statute of autonomy,' i.e. restoring political autonomy to Catalonia). In 1973, she co-founded the publishing house Llibres del Mall, dedicated to help emerging writers in Catalan in publishing their works. She admitted she was feeling left out and intimidated in the group of young writers, yet again as a guest or a stranger, an appendix to her then husband Ramon Pinyol Balasch. This has changed after she won the most prestigious Catalan literary award of the time – the 'Premi Carles Riba de poesia,' for her first book of poems *Cau de llunes* ('Moon Hideaway,' 1977). In *Cau de llunes* she mixes classical poetic form with motifs and songs taken from popular culture, a technique that she also applies in *Bruixa de dol* ('The Witch in Mourning,' 1979), thus problematizing the binary between Classical and popular language. Indeed, as Lluïsa Julià recalls, Marçal's first award also entailed crossing a boundary, a sudden change of status: from being considered the appendix to her partner to entering the group of published and acclaimed poets. *Bruixa de dol* became the poetic bestseller of the time, with four editions and four thousand books sold.<sup>27</sup> Marçal's growing popularity, however, did not keep her from collaborating actively with the Llibres del Mall publishing house (until 1978), nor from publishing all her books there until it closed in 1988.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2020), p. 44.

<sup>27</sup> Julià, p. 186.

<sup>28</sup> Julià, p. 152.

In her third book of poems, *Sal Oberta* ('Open Salt,' 1982), Marçal incorporated a cycle of poems on gestation and the experience of maternity – also the central theme of *La germana, l'estrangera* ('The Sister, The Foreigner,' 1985). Maternity as lived experience thus entered for the first time the realm of literary representation in Catalan.<sup>29</sup> Marçal spoke of maternity as a choice, proclaiming the women's right not only to have an abortion, but also to have babies as single mothers, which caused a scandal in her social circle. As a divorcee, an unmarried woman who gave birth to a daughter and decided to raise her alone, Marçal continued to make her own decisions against the social norms imposed on women as she came out as lesbian. Both *Terra de mai* ('Land of Never,' 1982), in which Marçal writes for the first time in Catalan poetry about love between two women,<sup>30</sup> and *Llengua abolida* ('Abolished Tongue') Marçal's complete poetic works, won the 'Flor Natural' ('Wildflower') prize at the Jocs Florals ('Floral Games,' one of the most important poetry competitions in Catalan) of Barcelona in 1981. In *Desglaç* ('Thaw,' 1989), Marçal continues the topic of lesbian desire; she also speaks of the death of her father in a section entitled 'Daddy'<sup>31</sup> in allusion to one of Sylvia Plath's most known poems. Marçal symbolically links the death of her father to the slow but progressive 'death' of patriarchal domination in literature and language, this connection is then repeated in her only novel, *La passió segons Renée Vivien*<sup>32</sup> ('The Passion According to Renée Vivien,' 1994, translated into English by Helena Buffery and Kathleen McNerney), based on the life and work of Renée Vivien, an English-born, French-speaking lesbian poet who lived in the fin-de-siècle Paris. The novel contains numerous multilingual insertions, but also translations of Vivien's texts that, oftentimes, are not marked as translations, but incorporated into the text, thus reflecting on the fantasy of a complete (and confessedly utopian) transfer or metamorphosis of one language and cultural history into another. In the novel, different genres, languages, times and spaces are intertwined, as if "translated" into the plot narrated in contemporary Catalan. Boundaries between biography, quotation, translation and literary fiction are signaled and constantly crossed.

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<sup>29</sup> Riba, *Maria-Mercè Marçal: L'escriptura permeable*, p. 46.

<sup>30</sup> When it comes to prose, the earliest, very indirect mention of love between women was Víctor Català's (Caterina Albert's) short story 'Carnestoltes.' ('Carnival,' 1907) Lesbian love became an explicit, deliberate topic for the first time with Carme Riera's 1975 book of short stories *Te deix, amor, la mar com a penyora*. I briefly discuss Marçal's engagement with both short stories in Chapter Five.

<sup>31</sup> For a close analysis of the father figure in "Daddy" see: Alfons Gregori i Gomis, "'Daddy" de Maria-Mercè Marçal: pare i filla, filla i pare,' in *Poesia històrica y autobiogràfica (1975-1999)*, ed. by José Romera (Madrid: Visor Libros, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> The novel obtained the *Charlemagne* award in 1994, and the 'Crítica Serra d'Or' prize in 1995, the Creixells award in 1995, and the 'Institució de les Lletres Catalanes' ('Institution for Catalan Literature') 1996 award.

Vivien's life was one of Marçal's biggest passion since 1984 when she first discovered her work. A foreigner, a permanent 'guest' in Paris, a lesbian, assertively claiming her space within the male-dominated literary canon, Vivien became an important inspiration for Marçal, who dialogued not only with her, but also with the Parnassian imagery, very much present in Vivien's work, implicitly questioning not only the domination of male writers in the French literary canon, but also the position of French among the European literary languages.

After 1994, the main focus of Marçal's efforts shifted to the feminist cause. She was striving to consolidate the women writers' collective of the Catalan PEN Club Centre, she organized meetings in homage to women writers and conducted panel discussions, she also contributed to anthologies of texts written by women. Her contributions to the genres of the essay and literary criticism include many multiple-authored publications, regarding women writers in different languages. Her subjects included Pauline M. Tarn, Caterina Albert (Víctor Català), Maria Antònia Salvà, Colette, Rosa Leveroni, Clementina Arderiu, Marina Tsvetaeva, and Anna Ahkmatova. As a working class, lesbian feminist who supported Catalan self-determination, Marçal has striven make literature in Catalan more homely, more welcoming to women and to diverse visions of writing from the margins.

Marçal's literature, rich in dialectal vocabulary, is written almost exclusively in Catalan, with occasional interjections in Latin, Greek, Italian, French and sometimes Spanish, all clearly marked as foreign. While firmly rooted in the Catalan tradition, Marçal also drew inspiration from other Iberian poets, most notably the Andalusian Federico García Lorca and the Galician Rosalia de Castro; she was interested in the Occitan tradition of troubadours and fostered literary alliances with diverse French poets, as if acknowledging the intersections and bifurcations that both connect and differentiate between writers in various Romance languages. The poet was also interested in the internal diversity of the Catalan-speaking regions, seeking her references in writers from Valencia and the Balearic Islands. In Marçal's early poetry, the images of a Catalan small town community life are immediately followed by references to ancient Greece and Rome and by feminist manifestos. Her reflection on language preservation is deeply infused with a preoccupation for maintaining the symbolic diversity of Catalan, hence the prominence of dialectal vocabulary in her poetry, especially in her first two published books.

An important part of Marçal's own literary work was translation of the works of other women writers. She translated books by Colette, Leonor Fini, and Marguerite Yourcenar from

French into Catalan. She collaborated with Monika Zgustova to translate from Russian and publish a selection of poems by Anna Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetaeva. Marçal's attitude towards translation, similarly to her way of incorporating intertextual references into her texts, points to the importance of conceptualizing boundaries in cross-lingual or multilingual communication. From the beginning, and certainly later into her career, Marçal problematizes the idea of language and nation as a home; she moves between and across languages, identity codes, forms of action, and literary genres, pointing to the permeability of the boundaries that separate nationals from foreigners. In one of her books, Caterina Riba summarizes Marçal's poetics as 'escriptura permeable' ('permeable writing')<sup>33</sup> because of the way in which Marçal's texts 'absorb' the texts of others. Indeed, intertextuality is of utmost importance in Marçal's feminist literary project. In her book, Riba provides a detailed list of writers, philosophers and artists that Marçal engaged with, ranging from the canonic Akhmatova or Colette to Anna Dodas, Felícia Fuster and others, whose work has still not been sufficiently recognized internationally.

The idea of permeability also reflects Marçal's feminist understanding of translation, intertextuality, and writing as building connections and relationships between writers, especially women writers, embracing mutual influence. Contrary to Harold Bloom's claim that '[p]oetic history [...] is held to be indistinguishable from poetic influence since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves,' Marçal's strategies to translate, critically read other writers and write in dialogue with them seems to actively search for influence as part of a collaborative feminist effort to transform the space of the symbolic.<sup>34</sup> As Riba rightfully observes,

Marçal dialoga amb escriptors concrets, però també se suma a determinats debats dins el moviment feminista, com la possibilitat d'un llenguatge femení, la revisió de la triple figura del pare/Pare (la del *paterfamilias*, la del pare biològic, i la del Déu pare), l'encaix de la dona al cristianisme, o les polítiques d'ubicació.<sup>35</sup>

[Marçal dialogues with specific writers, but she also contributes to certain debates within the feminist movement, on such topics as the possibility of a feminine language, the revision of the triple father/Father figure (i.e. *paterfamilias*, the biological father, and God as father), the place of the woman in Christianity, the politics of location.]

<sup>33</sup> See: Riba, *Maria-Mercè Marçal: L'escriptura permeable*.

<sup>34</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Riba, *Maria-Mercè Marçal: L'escriptura permeable*, p. 26.

Marçal's vision of writing can thus be summarized as a dynamic, collaborative task. In this sense, her writing can be described as hospitable: both embracing diversity and recognizing the challenges that limit the access of certain voices, such as women's or queer writing, to the realm of the canon.

In 1996, after the poet was diagnosed with cancer, she started writing a journal about the last months of her life, which was later published together with her correspondence with Joan Paul Goujon, Vivien's bibliographer, as a book titled *El senyal de la pèrdua* (2014). In her last volume of poetry, *Raó del cos* ('The Body's Reason,' 2000, published posthumously and translated into English by Montserrat Abelló and Noèlia Diaz-Vicedo), Marçal poeticizes her struggle against cancer, of which she died in 1997. Again, for the first time in Catalan letters, Marçal is dialoguing with her —the ill woman's— body, testing its limits, and at the same time calling for more visibility of illness, not as a metaphor, not only as experience, but as a route towards shifting the established paradigms of understanding community, communication, and communicability. In the book, the poet is dialoguing, among others, with Susan Sontag's 1978 *Illness As Metaphor*, she is condemning the estrangement and exclusion of the ill from the country of the healthy. In an ultimate act of hospitality, Marçal invites her readers to partake in her process of dying, which she understand as a radical abolition of boundaries that separate the subject from the outside world. In one of her last poems she writes: 'Morir: potser només | perdre forma i contorns, | desfer-se, ser | xuclada endins | de l'úter viu, | matriu de déu | mare: desnéixer.'<sup>36</sup> (To die: perhaps only to | lose shape and outline | to undo oneself, to be | swallowed inside | the uterus alive, | god's womb, | mother: to become unborn.)<sup>37</sup>

When it comes to Fiedorczuk, we do not know much about her biography, except for some fragmentary information the poet shares on social media. This is partially due to the differences between the two writers in the way in which they construct their literary personas, but it is also worth noting that more critical materials in general are available on Marçal than on Fiedorczuk. We also count with Marçal's thorough, posthumous biography written by Lluïsa Julià, on whose work I largely rely in this thesis. While Marçal is generally considered one of the 'great poets' of

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<sup>36</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 483.

<sup>37</sup> Maria-Mercè Marçal, *The Body's Reason. Poems in Catalan*, transl. by Montserrat Abelló and Noèlia Díaz Vicedo (London: Francis Boutle Publishers, 2014), p. 51.



the Catalan language, or, as Alfons Gregori i Gomis puts it, ‘a major poet in a minor language,’<sup>38</sup> Fiedorczuk’s work, not to mention her life, is still fairly unknown to the wider public, although there has been a significant growth in her popularity in the recent years and especially after the publication of her last novel *Pod słońcem* (‘Under the sun,’ 2020).

The Polish poet hardly engages with the topic of the oppression of the Polish language and culture during Stalinism, after the Nazi invasion or earlier on, after the partitions and until World War One. The recent history of Poland is present in her last novel, but there is little or no information available as to how the history and politics of Poland played out in her personal history. As Fiedorczuk explains, since history leaves a trace in language, her relationship with Polish language implies her relationship with Polish history:

Jest wielu polskich pisarzy, starszych i współczesnych, którzy są dla mnie niesłychanie istotni. Fascynuje mnie prozodia poezji polskiej – u genialnych autorów takich jak Mickiewicz czy Słowacki albo bliski mi ostatnio Bolesław Leśmian. Prozodia poezji współczesnej jest zakorzeniona w języku polskim z całą jego historią, w melodiach, rytmach. Także mój związek z historią Polski przejawia się przede wszystkim w języku, a w mniejszym stopniu w tematach, które poruszam w moim pisaniu.

[There are many Polish writers, older and contemporary, who are essential for me. I am fascinated by the prosody of the Polish poetry, especially in genius authors such as Mickiewicz or Słowacki, or Bolesław Leśmian, who has recently become important for me. The prosody of the contemporary poetry is rooted in the Polish language and in its whole history, in its melodies and rhythms. So my relationship with the history of Poland most of all concerns the language; it is less present in the topics that I discuss in my writing.]

Fiedorczuk thus relates to what is often described as ‘Polish literature’ mainly through the Polish language, even as she claims to have a love and hate relationship with the Polish literary tradition.<sup>39</sup> Polish, as well as Belarussian and Rusyn are present in Fiedorczuk’s life, as she admits in an interview about *Bliskie kraje*<sup>40</sup> (‘Close Lands,’ 2016).<sup>41</sup> Apart from the short stories,

<sup>38</sup> See: Alfons Gregori i Gomis, ‘Maria-Mercè Marçal, La miglior fabra,’ *Buntowniczk. Głosy kobiet we współczesnej literaturze katalońskiej*, ed. Alfons Gregori Alfons, Maciejewski J. Witold, Wegner Magdalena (Poznań, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2019)

<sup>39</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, Katarzyna Nowak, ‘Terytorium człowiek,’ interview for Channel 2 of the Polish Radio (2016) <<https://www.polskieradio24.pl/8/4801/Artykul/1627273,Terytorium-czlowiek-Spotkanie-z-Julia-Fiedorczuk>> [accessed 18 February 2020]

<sup>40</sup> I refer to the radio show ‘Spotkanie autorskie’ (‘A meeting with the author’) aired on 4 June 2016. <<http://www.polskieradio.pl/8/4801/Artykul/1627273,Terytorium-czlowiek-Spotkanie-z-Julia-Fiedorczuk>> [accessed 5 April 2017]

<sup>41</sup> *Bliskie kraje* is Fiedorczuk’s most recent collection of short stories which constitutes an edited and expanded version of *Poranek Marii*, ‘Mary’s Morning,’ originally published in 2010.

Fiedorczuk published three novels: *Biała Ofelia* ('White Ophelia,' 2011), a lesbian love-story that touches upon the question of 'reality' and 'literature' in textual representation, *Nieważkość* ('Zero Gravity,' 2015), the life story of three women and a reflection on sexual violence, and *Pod słońcem*, mentioned above, a semi-autobiographical family saga, which explores the twentieth century wars, migration, and relationships between human and non-human languages and perceptions.

Fiedorczuk's collections of poetry —*Listopad nad Narwią* ('November at the River Narew,' 2000), *Bio* ('Bio,' 2004), *Planeta rzeczy zagubionych* ('A Planet of Things Lost,' 2006), *Tlen* ('Oxygen,' 2009), *tuż-tuż* ('almost-there,' 2012), and *Psalmy* ('Psalms,' 2017, which was granted the prestigious Wisława Szymborska prize in 2018)— show a deep concern with environmental issues, as well as other topics such as love, womanhood, motherhood, community, and communication. In her reflection on language and linguistic intermixing, Fiedorczuk constantly problematizes the understanding of symbolic language as a sign of a single, monolithic national belonging, but also as proof of human superiority over other living beings. Fiedorczuk is interested in exploring non-human modes of communication, silenced by anthropocentric perceptions of the world. In her introduction to ecocriticism *Cyborg w ogrodzie: wprowadzenie do ekokrytyki* ('Cyborg in the Garden: Introduction to Ecocriticism,' 2015), she presents briefly the ecocritical literary studies for the Polish readers. She also published a trilingual essay with Gerardo Beltrán, entitled *Ekopoetyka/Ecopoetics/Ecopoética* (2016), which the two poets call for 'an ecological defense of poetry' and in which they include their ecopoetic manifesto. The book's format relies on practices such as translation, code-switching and linguistic loans to underline the ability of poetic language to permeate, infiltrate, and investigate the porous boundaries that separate and define languages, dialects, registers, fields of knowledge, in order to find connections and create new ways of imagining a home for different kinds of humans and non-humans.

In spite of being a prolific writer, Fiedorczuk considers herself a stranger the realm of 'Polish literature,' as she claims not to identify with any particular nation. In an interview with Olena Sheremet, she says the following:

Zupełnie nie interesuje mnie kategoria narodowości, co najwyżej jako problem. Nie jestem stuprocentową Polką, rodzina mojego ojca przywędrowała z Białorusi. Jednak ważny jest fakt, że piszę po polsku – to materiał, którego używam. Z wykształcenia jestem anglistką i prace naukowe piszę wyłącznie po angielsku, natomiast nigdy nie

napisałam żadnego tekstu literackiego w tym języku, dlatego że polszczyzna jest bardzo intymnie związana z moim sposobem przeżywania świata. W polszczyźnie czuję się jak w skórze, w angielskim – jak w ubraniu.<sup>42</sup>

[I am not at all interested in the category of nationality, I only see it as a certain problematic. I am not hundred per cent Polish; my father's family came from Belarus. What is important to me is that I write in Polish – Polish is the fabric that I use. My background is in English Studies. I write my academic publications in English only, however, I have never written a literary text in this language. This is because Polish is very intimately attached to my way of experiencing the world. Polish is like skin to me; English is like clothing.]

Fiedorczuk's professed lack of interest in nationality as a category only regards the conservative visions of the nation, tied to 'pure' or 'unmixed' ethnic origins. In her work, she dialogues with the Polish tradition and is invested in recreating its image as a multicultural, multiethnic community:

Im jestem starsza, tym bardziej ciekawi mnie miejsce Słowiańszczyzny na mapie Europy. Polacy uważają czasem, że mieszkają w kraju etnicznie jednolitym, ale nie jest to prawda – na terenie tego kraju mieszkają: Romowie, Żydzi, Łemkowie, Kaszubowie, Ślązacy. Nie mam żadnych ciągów narodowościowych. Interesują mnie języki, sploty ludzkich historii, zdarzenia, miejsca, pejzaże, czyli psychogeografia i społeczna geografia regionów.<sup>43</sup>

[The older I get, the more interested I become in the place of Slavonic culture in the map of Europe. The Poles think sometimes that they inhabit an ethnically homogenous country, but this is not true – the Romani and Lemko people, the Jews, the Kashubians and Silesians live on the territory of this country. I have no nationalist temptations. I am interested in languages, in the entanglement of human histories, events, places, landscapes, which form a psychogeography and social geography of regions.]

Implicitly questioning a single, 'pure' national belonging, Fiedorczuk identifies with a complex identity composed of different fragments, and explores the space of the in-between, moving between different codes and perceptions.<sup>44</sup> The Polish poet's international, or perhaps transnational, identity claims seem related to her deliberate use of multilingualism. Her texts include interjections in Greek, English, Yiddish, Hebrew, Esperanto, Russian, and Sanskrit. The author describes the Polish that she uses as lyrical, literary, but also graphic, vulgar or used to

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<sup>42</sup> Olena Sheremet, "“Być może wcale nie jestem poetką” (Wywiad z Julią Fiedorczuk)," *Popmoderna*, January 2014 <<https://popmoderna.pl/byc-moze-wcale-nie-jestem-poetka-wywiad-z-julia-fiedorczuk/#>> [accessed: 13 May 2021]

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

explore eroticism,<sup>45</sup> which demonstrates the author's sensitivity not only to multilingual diversity, but also to the inner diversity of registers, styles and points of view in Polish.

Like Marçal, Fiedorczuk devotes an important part of her literary career to translation and literary criticism. Her academic articles are often devoted to women writers, such as Wisława Szymborska,<sup>46</sup> Laura Riding Jackson,<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Bishop,<sup>48</sup> and Marianne Moore,<sup>49</sup> among many others. She holds a PhD in Humanities and teaches American literature, English, and Ecocriticism at the University of Warsaw, and recently also in a travelling 'School of Eco-poetics,' which she founded together with Polish writer Filip Springer. She has translated the works of numerous North American poets, including Elizabeth Alexander, Wallace Stevens, John Ashbery and Forrest Gander, as well as publishing a two-volume collection of writings by Laura (Riding) Jackson. She collaborated with one of the most prestigious reviews specialized in literary translation into Polish, *Literatura na Świecie*, she also published books of translated texts. She published, in collaboration with Laurie Anderson, *Język przyszłości* ('The Language of the Future'), a collection of Anderson's short narratives translated into Polish by Fiedorczuk and illustrated by Anderson (2012). Her three other published translations are: *Korona dla Hansa Andersena* ('A Crown for Hans Andersen') with translated poems by Laura (Riding) Jackson,<sup>50</sup> *Obroty cudów* with translated poems by Laura (Riding) Jackson,<sup>51</sup> and the most recent *Bądź blisko* with translated poems by Forrest Gander.<sup>52</sup> Fiedorczuk's research could be described as feminist, ecocritical, and transnational. Apart from ecocriticism, she is also interested in questions of "high Modernism" and the poetic experimentations of the North American avantgardes, although her interests escape monolithic, national or linguistic labels. Even the label "American" (not to mention 'avant-garde'), is often problematized in contemporary criticism. As

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> See: Julia Fiedorczuk, 'Życie nie do pojęcia: O Wielkiej Liczbie Wisławy Szymborskiej' ('Life Impossible to Grasp. On Szymborska's Great Number'), *Interpretować Dalej* (2011), pp. 361-370.

<sup>47</sup> See: Julia Fiedorczuk, 'Laura Riding' in *Encyclopedia of American Poets and Poetry*, vol. 4 (2006), pp. 1376-1379, and 'Poem talking silence: a meditation on Laura Riding's renunciation of poetry' in *The Journal of Culture and the Unconscious*, vol. 2 (San Francisco, 2004), pp. 21-40.

<sup>48</sup> See: Julia Fiedorczuk, 'Pytania w kwestii domu. O poezji Elizabeth Bishop' ('Questions on the Notion of Home. On Elizabeth Bishop's Poetry') in *Piękniejszy Dom od Prozy. O amerykańskiej poezji kobiecej* (2005), pp. 79-94.

<sup>49</sup> See: Julia Fiedorczuk, "'The profession of humility': Marianne Moore's Ethical Artifice,' *Polish Journal for American Studies*, vol. 7 (2003)

<[https://journals.theasa.net/journals/name/polish\\_journal\\_for\\_american\\_studies/8056/](https://journals.theasa.net/journals/name/polish_journal_for_american_studies/8056/)> [Accessed 15 September 2020]

<sup>50</sup> Laura (Riding) Jackson, *Korona dla Hansa Andersena* (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2012)

<sup>51</sup> Laura (Riding) Jackson, *Obroty cudów* (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2012)

<sup>52</sup> Forrest Gander, *Bądź blisko* (Kraków: Lokator, 2020)

Fiedorczuk observes,

Nowe opracowania współczesnej literatury wprowadzają pojęcie transnarodowości, włączając w obszar namysłu także anglojęzycznych autorów z innych krajów (Kanada, Karaiby) oraz literaturę pisaną w innych językach (na przykład po hiszpańsku albo w językach rdzennej ludności amerykańskiej). [...] Ta część najnowszej historii kultury amerykańskiej nie została jeszcze w Polsce wyczerpująco opowiedziana.<sup>53</sup>

[New studies of contemporary literature introduce the term of transnationalism and include also English-speaking authors from different countries (Canada, the Caribbean) and literature written in different languages (for example in Spanish or in American indigenous languages). [...] This part of more recent cultural history of America has not yet been exhaustively told in Poland.]

When trying to answer the question of whether it is still relevant to seek innovation in poetry, Fiedorczuk analyzes the new forms of poetic experiments in the poetry written in the United States. In a study on North American Modernism in poetry, entitled, tellingly, *Złożoność nie jest zbrodnią* ('Complexity Is Not a Crime,') the poet reflects on the tensions between communication with readers and the questioning of limits in language, which may result in seeking "innovation" for its own sake, thus hindering the potential of literature to 'do things' artistically and politically. In *Złożoność nie jest zbrodnią*, she asks whether the notion of the avantgarde still makes sense in the context of the contemporary American poetry.<sup>54</sup> In the book, the author questions the idea of innovation for the sake of it and, via, Thomas Mann, adduces a threat of 'death from theory'<sup>55</sup> – when a poem reaches such levels of cryptic complexity that it cannot be interpreted without a very specific theoretical background. The experiments in Fiedorczuk's own poetry, rather than reinventing language as means of communication, explore the boundaries that separate different national languages.

The characters of Fiedorczuk's stories and novels are guests, strangers and travelers; we meet them on planes, in hotels, on islands, on a raft, drifting amidst the big ocean that flooded the Earth after the melting of icicles. None of them manages to 'fit in,' to see themselves as properly 'oriented' or 'directed' – they move 'from,' 'through,' 'towards,' and mostly across spaces, languages and times. The places of symbolic uprootedness that Fiedorczuk's protagonists often inhabit serve as bridges through which we access their inner worlds. In a way, some of her

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<sup>53</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, *Złożoność nie jest zbrodnią. Szkice o amerykańskiej poezji modernistycznej i postmodernistycznej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2016) p. 21.

<sup>54</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Złożoność*, p.12.

<sup>55</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Złożoność*, p. 12.

protagonists —the homeless Ewka, Zetka the collector of scrap, a mentally ill elderly man, an autistic painter, Misza who studies Esperanto, Anna the closeted lesbian...— speak a code, linguistic or not, that visibly stands out in comparison to the traditional registers of literary narration. They become both linguistic and cultural others, nomads, guests. It is the movement across, between or among languages that constitutes a way of cohabiting language, or languages, by different humans and non-humans that characterizes Fiedorczuk's characters.

Because of its transnational and ecopoetic character, Fiedorczuk's literature is concerned with hospitality, a concept that the poet has explored in multiple contexts. In an article that Fiedorczuk wrote in January this year, she comments on the poetry of Dariusz Sośnicki,<sup>56</sup> whose poetry she knows very well. Due to her familiarity with Sośnicki's poems, she admits to suddenly feeling 'lepiej, nie weselej, ale jakby jaśniej, mniej obco'<sup>57</sup> ('better, not more cheerful, but somehow brighter, less like a stranger'); the familiarity of the text reduces the feeling of strangeness of otherness in the reader, as if making her feel at home. Interested in this feeling of familiarity and homeliness, Fiedorczuk pays special attention to two poems: 'Zimą, na trzy godziny przed świtem,' ('In Winter, Three Hours Before Dawn') an intimate description of an early morning moment of stillness in a country house, and 'Jeszcze lepsi' ('Better still'), a philosophical reflection on otherness and hospitality. For Fiedorczuk, "Jeszcze lepsi" to wiersz z pozoru oschły i ironiczny. Ale lodowaty, prosty język relacjonuje sytuację pełną napięcia i podskórnej agresji. Oto pojawia się ktoś – obcy, inny.'<sup>58</sup> ("Jeszcze lepsi" is a seemingly cold and ironic poem. However, the frigid, simple language it uses describes a situation full of tension and subcutaneous aggression. Suddenly someone appears: a stranger, someone other'.) 'A guest from elsewhere,' as Sośnicki writes ('gość z innych stron'), for Fiedorczuk becomes a prelude to discuss what she describes as 'Ambiwalencja wobec gościa – owszem, przyjmimy cię, ale tylko na naszych warunkach, tylko jeśli przejdiesz błyskawiczny kurs naszego języka i opowiesz o sobie "naszymi słowami"'<sup>59</sup> ('the ambivalence of the guest – of course, we will accept you, but only on our conditions, only if you undergo a quick course of our language and tell us your story "in our words."') The proverbial 'Polish hospitality,' for Fiedorczuk,

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<sup>56</sup> Polish contemporary poet and publisher born in 1969.

<sup>57</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, 'Jeż na autostradzie: Gość-inność,' *Znak* (January 2021)

<<https://www.miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/gosc-innosc-fiedorczuk-jez-na-autostradzie/>> [accessed 11 May 2021]

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

przywodzi na myśl derridiańskie pojęcie hostipitality, łączące w sobie gościnność (hospitality) i wrogość (hostility). Pojęcie gościnności zakłada przecież, iż jesteśmy u siebie, że posiadamy ten kawałek Ziemi – inaczej niż ten, który przeszedł („przepląnął / a nawet przeskoczył”) takie czy inne zasieki. Przybysz, nie mając do niczego prawa, pozostaje skazany na naszą gościnność. Jeśli jest obcy, to właśnie dlatego iż my czujemy się tak bardzo u siebie. To nasze poczucie bycia w prawie czyni z gościa innego.<sup>60</sup>

[brings to mind the Derridian concept of hostipitality,<sup>61</sup> which combines hospitality and hostility. This is because the idea of hospitality is based on the conviction that we are at home, that we own this piece of land – unlike the person who came (“swimming/ or even jumping”) over these or other barbered walls. The stranger, who is not entitled to anything, is condemned to our hospitality. If he is a stranger it is because we feel so much at home. It is our sense of rightfulness that turns the guest into a stranger.]

In Sośnicki's poem, the Polish language becomes a 'barred wall' that keeps strangers, foreigners, off the territory of the nation. Sośnicki writes, as if addressing an arrogant trespasser: 'przeszedł pan i przepląnął, / a nawet przeskoczył / pod osłoną nocy, nic sobie nie robiąc / z zasieków „szcz” oraz fleksji' ('you walked and you swam, you even jumped over / veiled by the night, completely ignoring / the barred walls of "szcz" and declinations').<sup>62</sup> The nation becomes a 'home,' where the hosts are welcome and the guests are welcomed with covert hostility.

The guests or strangers, in Fiedorczuk's texts, may be foreign, but may also refer to those who are estranged from the national literary realm, hence the title of her essay 'Strangers in the Country of the Poet' in which Fiedorczuk reflects on the exclusion of women poets from the Polish canon. As a woman, Fiedorczuk speaks of herself as a 'guest,' a stranger. She writes:

Pisanie jest rodzajem walki, publikacja jest deklaracją niepodległości, zwłaszcza jeżeli tekst nie spełnia oczekiwań stawianych poezji kobiecej. Jednak czy budowanie silnej pozycji podmiotowej „ja – poetka” w istocie stanowi akt subwersji, czy może raczej ugruntowuje pewien model podmiotowości, który od zarania dziejów był męski? [...] *lubię* być dyletantką, amatorką, kimś, kto czasem pisze wiersze, a czasem prozę, bawi się tym i tamtym, czasem myśli, czasem śpiewa, ale niekoniecznie bierze udział w edypalnej walce o swój własny głos, aby stać się poetą w takim sensie, w jakim tylko mężczyźni bywali poetami (wielkimi rewolucjonistami języka)

If writing is a struggle of sorts, then publishing is a declaration of independence, especially if the text does not meet the demands usually made regarding 'feminine poetry.' But is building a strong poetic 'I' really a subversive act, or does it in fact reaffirm a certain model of subjectivity, which was, since the beginning of time,

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>61</sup> See: Jacques Derrida, HOSTIPITALITY, transl. by Barry Stocker and Forbes Morlock, *Angelaki: journal of theoretical humanities*, 2000-12-01, Vol.5 (3), Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 3-18.

<sup>62</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'Jeż na autostradzie.'

masculine? [...] I *like* being a dilettante, an amateur, someone who sometimes writes poems, sometimes prose, who plays with this and that, who sometimes thinks, sometimes sings, but not necessarily partakes in the Oedipal struggle for one's own voice, not necessarily strives to become a poet in the sense in which men have been poets: great revolutionaries of language]<sup>63</sup>

As a guest in the world of male poets, Fiedorczuk observes that her most expected role should be to write love stories or autobiographical testimonies of oppression rather than experimenting with language. But, as mentioned before, the poet does not appear to be interested in the experiment for the experiment's sake. She decides, however, to inhabit the margins of the canon and turn them into a home, not only for women, but also for non-human beings. In assuming the position of a writer-guest, she purports to use the literary language in more hospitable ways, not only to women, but also to non-human beings.

Fiedorczuk's essay on Sośnicki is entitled, tellingly, 'Hedgehog on a Motorway: Hostipitality.' This is because, for Fiedorczuk, the Derridian concept of 'hostipitality,' which she translates as 'gość-inność' ('guest-otherness,' which are the two components of the Polish word 'gościnność' – hospitality) may also be applied to the relation of humans with non-humans. A half-dead hedgehog on a motorway appears in 'Zetka,' one of Fiedorczuk's short stories from the book *Blikie kraje* ('Close lands', henceforth *Bliskie kraje*). The hedgehog, who dies hit by a car on a motorway that is crossing a forest in which it lives, becomes a guest in its own home, where humans feel overwhelmingly and unstopably 'at home,' in their right to occupy the space. In the story (which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Five), the hedgehog is moved and buried by a collector of scrap, Zetka, who will soon discover her house was burned down. Like the hedgehog, Zetka is a stranger in the world of car-owners and property owners, entitled to own and use the land by the laws of capitalism.

In spite of the inherent ambivalence of 'hospitality,' Fiedorczuk does believe it could be a starting point to think about a new, more welcoming vision literature. She believes that 'warto zacząć mówić precyzyjnie, a zarazem w taki sposób, aby słowa stanowiły gościnne otwarcie się na kontakt z innymi istotami – ludzkimi i nieludzkimi'<sup>64</sup> ('it's worth to start speaking with more precision, but at the same time in a way that will make our words a hospitable opening for a contact with other beings – human and non-human'.) One of the ways to overcome the

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<sup>63</sup> Sheremet, 'Być może wcale nie jestem poetką.'

<sup>64</sup> Sheremet, 'Być może wcale nie jestem poetką.'



anthropocentric and patriarchal symbolic impasse, for Fiedorczuk, has to do with multilingualism and translation. In an article dedicated to Ezra Pound's translations from Chinese, Fiedorczuk speaks of the creation of a 'new poetics, a poetics deriving its strength from translation,'<sup>65</sup> which the Polish author attributes to Pound. Here the poet presents translation and literary multilingualism as mutually entangled concepts. The multilingual form of Pound's *Cantos*, according to Fiedorczuk, 'places the reader in a situation where he or she is demanded to perform some of the work of "translation," as when we are forced to look up the meanings of fragments in languages other than English or to make connections between disparate images or phrases.'<sup>66</sup> The reader, initially startled at the presence of "foreign" elements in a predominantly English text, is faced with a choice: 'to look at [the Chinese characters introduced into the text], to contemplate, or to learn.'<sup>67</sup> To switch the language of reading and writing also entails switching the language of feeling and experiencing the world. By mixing languages and points of view, one can 'make things new,' without questioning language to the point of non-communicability. Fiedorczuk sees introducing words in different languages or even alphabets as an invitation for the reader to 'join the dots,' fill in the silences.

In a trilingual essay *Ekopoetyka/Ecopoética/Ecopoetics*, which Fiedorczuk wrote with Beltrán, the authors lay out what they call their ecopoetic manifesto:

In keeping with the etymological meaning of the word 'ecopoetics', derived from the Greek words 'oikos' (household) and 'poiēsis' (to make), ecopoetics will be understood as a practice of inhabiting the planet Earth which, in turn, is part of a larger cosmos.<sup>68</sup>

Literature, thus, should aim towards hospitality, towards an 'opening up' of language to make it more hospitable; it should seek to cross and lift rigid boundaries between languages, nations, and species. For Fiedorczuk, 'Przez większość życia koncentrujemy się na przeżywaniu samych siebie, pielęgnujemy dawne traumy, żale [...], ta euro-amerykańska [kultura] jest niebywale narcystyczna'<sup>69</sup> ('for most of our lives we concentrate on experiencing ourselves, we cherish our past traumas and regrets [...]; this Euro-American [culture] is incredibly narcissistic.') In her

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<sup>65</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, 'Radical East? Some Notes on Pound's "Ignorant" Translations from the Chinese,' *Acta Philologica* 2014 (45), p. 58.

<sup>66</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'Radical East?,' p. 59.

<sup>67</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, 'Radical East?,' p. 60.

<sup>68</sup> Gerardo Beltrán, Julia Fiedorczuk, *Ekopoetyka: Ekologiczna obrona poezji/ Ecopoética: Una defensa ecológica de la poesía/ Ecopoetics: An ecological "defense" of poetry* (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Iberyjskich i Iberoamerykańskich UW, 2015), p. 205.

<sup>69</sup> Sheremet, 'Być może wcale nie jestem poetką.'

writing, Fiedorczuk offers a different kind of a writing subject – one who travels and encounters difference, who constantly deconstructs her circumstances and allows other voices, foreign and domestic, human and non-human, to permeate hers. Indeed, as I will argue, boundaries, frontiers and delimitations, but also mixing, crossing and interconnectedness will significantly mark both Fiedorczuk's and Marçal's understanding of language and literature. Hospitality, in Fiedorczuk's and Marçal's texts, is an invitation to find out to what extent one is ready to query his or her own comfort, his or her ability to feel 'at home' in the nation, in language, and on planet Earth.

### **Literary Multilingualism: Queering/Querying The Nation**

Is the dictionary ideological? This question opens Agnieszka Zygmunt's article dedicated to the analysis of one of the normative dictionaries of Polish.<sup>70</sup> Implicitly, the question also regards ideological contents of the language, especially in its normative version. In her article, Zygmunt examines the new normative dictionary of Polish and argues that the seemingly apolitical, prescriptive norms do indeed imply specific ideological views. Tacit moral judgements are conveyed between the lines, in the selection of exemplary sentences in the dictionary. Exemplary excerpts such as 'He earns money and she rocks the cradle' that purport to illustrate the norms of correct language use implicitly convey a set of social norms: a certain understanding of 'men', 'women,' 'family,' 'familiarity,' and 'community,' amongst others. The seemingly extra-linguistic signs of gendered 'correctness,' at times barely concealed behind a presumably neutral, linguistic knowledge, are replicated, reflected, reinstated, and ultimately endowed with the authority of the dictionary, here a normative one. In Zygmunt's words:

Język nie jest medium przezroczystym. Przeciwnie, jest on bardzo silnie uwikłany w wartościowanie. O tym, jakie ktoś wybierze słowo z bogatej najczęściej palety synonimów, z reguły nie stanowi przypadek. [...] Pozycje ortoepiczne są szczególnym rodzajem słowników. Przedstawiają bowiem specyficzny zbiór słów danego języka – te, które z jakiegoś powodu mogą użytkownikowi języka sprawiać trudność. Mają charakter normotwórczy i ową normę utrwalający; dla korzystających z nich są wzorem, jak należy mówić i pisać. Skoro tak, można oczekiwać, że będą stanowiły wzór nie tylko językowy, lecz także światopoglądowy.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Agnieszka Zygmunt, 'On przynosi pieniądze, a ona buja dziecko, czyli jak role mężczyzny i kobiety w rodzinie postrzega *Nowy słownik poprawnej polszczyzny PWN*,' *Poradnik językowy*, 05 (Dom Wydawniczy ELIPSA, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Zygmunt, p. 62.

[Language is not a transparent medium. On the contrary, it is tangled in a range of judgements. Selecting a particular word from a usually rich scope of synonyms is rarely coincidental. [...] An orthoepic dictionary is a special kind of dictionary. It offers a specific combination of words in a given language: words that for some reason may cause difficulties for the language user. These dictionaries are designed to create and preserve the norm; they are an example for their users of the way in which they should speak and write. If that is the case, we may expect that these dictionaries will not only contain a model of writing, but also of ideological thinking.]

To say that language is a non-transparent medium suggests that thoughts, ideas and imaginings are conceivable and conceived through language; they are mediated by language and its metaphors. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson famously argued, we think and perceive in metaphors.<sup>72</sup> With reference to conceptual metaphors, i.e. the systems of metaphorical concepts involved in organizing our cognition, Lakoff states that '[b]ecause so much of our social and political reasoning makes use of this system of metaphorical concepts, any adequate appreciation of even the most mundane social and political thought requires an understanding of this system.'<sup>73</sup>

In Polish, normative dictionaries are most commonly referred to as 'orthoepic,' which is the term Zygmunt uses in her article, evoking a whole array of metaphors related to straightness, rightfulness, and proper orientation. According to the Oxford Dictionary Online, the word 'orthoepy' is defined as 'the correct or accepted pronunciation of words' or 'the study of correct or accepted pronunciation.'<sup>74</sup> However, in the Dictionary of Polish by the *Polskie Wydawnictwo Naukowe* (Polish Academic Publishers, henceforth PWN), the meaning of *ortoepia* is more ambiguous: it refers to linguistic correctness in general.<sup>75</sup> In the dictionary of the Catalan Language by the *Institut d'Estudis Catalans* (Institute of Catalan Studies, henceforth IEC), the word *ortoèpia* is presented as a synonym of *ortologia*, i.e. the strand of normative grammar that establishes the correct pronunciation of a language.<sup>76</sup> In both languages, the word

<sup>72</sup> See: George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we live by* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>73</sup> George Lakoff, 'Metaphor, Morality, and Politics, Or, Why Conservatives Have Left Liberals In the Dust', *Social Research*, summer 1995, Vol. 62, No. 2, 'The Power of Metaphor' (The Johns Hopkins University Press), p. 177.

<sup>74</sup> 'orthoepy' in *Oxford Dictionary of English* <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/orthoepy>> [accessed 4 August 2020]

<sup>75</sup> 'ortoepia' in *Słownik języka polskiego PWN* <<https://sjp.pwn.pl/slowniki/ortoepia.html>> [accessed 4 August 2020]

<sup>76</sup> 'ortoèpia' in *Optimot: consultes lingüístiques* <[http://aplicacions.llengua.gencat.cat/llc/AppJava/index.html?action=Principal&method=detall&input\\_cercar=ortoepia&numPagina=1&database=DIEC&idFont=51432&idHit=51432&tipusFont=%3CI%3EDiccionari+de+la+llengua+catalana%3C%2FI%3E+de+l%27Institut+d%27Estudis+Catalans+%28a+edici%F3%29&numeroResultat=1&databases\\_avansada=&categories\\_avansada=&clickLink=detall&titol=orto%28Totes%29&tipusCerca=cerca.tot](http://aplicacions.llengua.gencat.cat/llc/AppJava/index.html?action=Principal&method=detall&input_cercar=ortoepia&numPagina=1&database=DIEC&idFont=51432&idHit=51432&tipusFont=%3CI%3EDiccionari+de+la+llengua+catalana%3C%2FI%3E+de+l%27Institut+d%27Estudis+Catalans+%28a+edici%F3%29&numeroResultat=1&databases_avansada=&categories_avansada=&clickLink=detall&titol=orto%28Totes%29&tipusCerca=cerca.tot)> [accessed 4 August 2020]

*ortoèpia/ortoe pia*, like the English ‘orthoepy’, stems from the Greek *orthoepeia*: ‘correct speech,’ from *orthos*: ‘right’ or ‘straight’ and *epos, epe*: ‘word.’ ‘Correct speech’ therefore implies ‘rightness’ and ‘straightness.’ The task of “correcting” a language may be seen as the act of making words “straight” or “right” in the sense of rightful but also righteous, legitimate and proper, in their adherence to the standards of linguistic purity and correctness. In this sense, multilingual writing and cross-lingual referencing, which both Marçal and Fiedorczuk practice in their texts, constitutes a movement across —and potentially against— the understanding of language correctness or language purity as a monolithic, single, timeless norm and the idea that literature ‘belongs’ to and is defined by a single, national language or heritage.

The conceptualization of the language norm reflected in the word ‘orthoepy’ is founded on spatial metaphors – ‘right’ or ‘straight’ evoke positive associations, while ‘left,’ ‘crooked,’ ‘deviant,’ etc., suggest negativity. The same metaphors is at play in the opposition of ‘straight’ vis-a-vis ‘queer.’ As Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick observes, the word ‘queer’ could be read not only in contrast to heteronormative, patriarchal models of family, but also as opposed to the assumed homogeneity of national languages. In spite of its Anglo-American history, which points to the oppression of LGBTQ community and to a redefinition of a once offensive term, a history that is difficult to transport to another context,<sup>77</sup> etymologically, ‘queer’ is a multilingual concept. According to Sedgwick, ‘Queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive-recurrent, eddying, troublant. The word “queer” itself means across — it comes from the indo-European root *twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*.’<sup>78</sup> In this sense, we may see multilingual writing as a queer, ‘continuing moment,’ a

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<sup>77</sup> As a cultural concept, queer most often relates to LGBT identity and resistance, however, in this dissertation it is used in the context of multilingual, trans-national crossing that may contribute to ‘queer’ the discourses of language and nation that are based on heteronormative, authoritarian models of family. I am aware that ‘queer’ when referred to sexual identities is a term rooted in English, and it does not always ‘translate well.’ What is more, the discussion on the meaning and scope of queer came after Marçal’s life and death. In different languages queer shares the conceptual territory with the local normative, under local conditions. In reflecting on the limits of “queer” Brad Epps points to the consequences of using “queer” outside of the English-speaking context. These may include, apart from embracing linguistic imperialism, ‘the lack of interpersonal memory’ conveyed by the history of “queer”, the history which involved reclaiming a term originally tied to exclusion, othering and violence, as a means of expressing positive, collective identities. One cannot reclaim or re-signify a term, as Epps observes, while erasing the memory of the prior, original meaning. (See: Brad Epps, ‘Retos, riesgos, pautas y promesas de la teoría *queer*’ in *Revista Iberoamericana*, Vol. LXXIV, Issue 225, October-December 2008, pp. 897-920.) Due to limitations of space, I am not able to examine and decide on the use of potential alternative terms for Polish and Catalan. While the debate on LGBTI identities is not central to this thesis, the concept of queer, understood as an ‘oblique,’ ‘transversal’ or ‘deviant’ attitude towards language and nation is relevant to both Marçal’s and Fiedorczuk’s understanding of national languages and cultural production.

<sup>78</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. XII.

movement across ‘clear-cut’ or ‘straightforward’ definitions of languages and the communities of their speakers, often defined as nations. Multilingual writing could be seen as the work of ‘queering’ her national culture, if we adopt a broader definition of queer, such as the one proposed by Sara Ahmed:

First, I have used ‘queer’ as a way of describing what is ‘oblique’ or ‘off line.’ [...] Second, I have used queer to describe specific sexual practices. Queer in this sense would refer to those who practice nonnormative sexualities [...], which as we know involves a personal and social commitment to living in an oblique world, or in a world that has an oblique angle in relation to that which is given. [...] To make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things. As I have suggested, the effects of such a disturbance are uneven, precisely given that the world is already organized around certain forms of living—certain times, spaces, and directions.<sup>79</sup>

Of course, both Marçal’s and Fiedorczuk’s texts engage with queer characters in the literal sense of the word; the presence of lesbian women is especially prominent. Marçal’s work has been studied in terms of alternative, non-linear or queer genealogies.<sup>80</sup> Fiedorczuk, for her part, often takes inspiration from queer Anglo-American poets and critics in her academic work. While it is not the literal meaning of queer, in itself troubled, that plays the leading role in this dissertation, I will attend to those characters in Fiedorczuk’s and Marçal’s work whose sexually non-conforming codes of expression contribute to questioning the understanding of language as a monolithic entity tied to a single nation. In so doing, those characters produce moments of creative disorientation, that is, as Ahmed puts it, ‘throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground.’<sup>81</sup> In exploring Marçal’s and Fiedorczuk’s use of language, I discuss the ways in which Fiedorczuk and Marçal ‘queer’ (disturb, stir up, reassemble) the relationships between the national language or literature and nation. Part of this work on language and nation is achieved through a reevaluation and a reassembling of the national imagery related to family and community, but an equally important part happens in language, in the mixing of languages, in translation, and in intertextuality.

Both Fiedorczuk and Marçal are multilingual authors. While their texts are written predominantly in Polish and Catalan, both authors are aware of the multilingual contexts of their

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<sup>79</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology, Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 161-162.

<sup>80</sup> For example by Natasha Tanna in *Queer Genealogies* and by Caterina Riba in *L’escriptura permeable*, both referenced in the introduction.

<sup>81</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 157.

respective reading communities. In tracing the writers' attitudes towards language, I consider multilingual practices in their writings not only as sites of exchange among different languages and different visions of standardization, but also as artifices that may serve to underline the plural and hybrid dimensions of apparently 'single' languages and nations. Following K. Alfons Knautch's definition, (quoted by Albert Rossich and Jordi Cornellà, 2014),<sup>82</sup> I understand multilingualism in literature as either intra-textual (using various languages in literary texts) or extratextual — when the author is multilingual, but the text is written entirely or predominantly in one language.<sup>83</sup> When discussing the modes of multilingualism, Laura Lonsdale states that '[i]n writing that is recognizably multilingual, two or more languages are actively and evidently present in the text.'<sup>84</sup> However, the author understands literary multilingualism in much broader terms, ranging 'from the implicit 'galicismo mental' ('mental gallicism') of Rubén Darío's *modernismo*, to the explicit language mixing of surrealist or concrete poetry, to the open bilingualism of contemporary Latino writing in the USA.'<sup>85</sup> In a footnote, Lonsdale explains she refers to a letter from Juan Valera to Darío, in which Valera distinguished between 'a purely lexical use of gallicisms and the poet's own, more profound 'galicismo de la mente' ('gallicism of the mind'), which Darío himself also referred to as 'galicismo mental' ('mental gallicism').'<sup>86</sup> Multilingualism, thus, would include not only the presence of more than one language in a text, which constitutes the most common definition of the term, but also mixing literary resources from another literary tradition into a text. In the case of Darío, Nicaraguan writer who became one of the main representatives of Latin American Modernism, this would mean, among others, transporting the imagery and literary tools of French Parnassian poetry into Spanish. Furthermore, Lonsdale identifies

four principal ways in which multilingualism can manifest itself in literature, of which translingualism (writing in a second language) and self-translation are perhaps the most common and widely studied. [...] Self-translation is a common phenomenon among writers working in a minority language, like the Catalan novelist Carme Riera or the Galician poet and novelist Manuel Rivas, who often translate their own work into a majority language in order to reach a wider audience. [...] Two other ways in which

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<sup>82</sup> Albert Rossich, Jordi Cornellà, *El plurilingüisme en la literatura catalana: retòrica, versemblança, diglòssia* (Bellcaire d'Empordà: Edicions Vítel·la, 2014).

<sup>83</sup> Rossich, Cornellà. *El plurilingüisme en la literatura catalana*, p. 43

<sup>84</sup> Lonsdale, p. 11.

<sup>85</sup> Laura Lonsdale, *Multilingualism and Modernity: Barbarisms in Spanish and American Literature* (Oxford: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

multilingualism can manifest itself in literature include the attempt by writers to make one language ‘speak’ or resound in another, as in the novels of Hemingway or Arguedas; and the integration of two or more languages simultaneously into the body of the text [...].<sup>87</sup>

In Lonsdale’s definition the intratextual and extratextual facets of multilingualism blend, as both translingualism and self-translation require of the author to be multilingual, while integrating more languages into a text does not. In this dissertation, I focus on the last two types of multilingualism: making one language resound in another and integrating two or more language simultaneously into the text. When it comes to translingualism, it will appear as a topic rather than a literary practice, especially in Marçal. In this dissertation, I also include translation, not as the opposite of multilingualism, but as part of the multilingual spectrum. I will focus on those aspects of translation that are relevant to talk not only about the transfer of meaning from one language to another, but that also reveal the incompleteness of the transfer and contribute to revealing the multilingual residues of translation. Those traces of multiplicity in translation also help describe the complex relationships of power among different languages and codes of expression. What is more, in both authors’ writing the boundaries between translation and writing are often blurred, this is why their practice as translators sheds more light on their practice as multilingual writers.

Multilingual expression shares some of its problematics with translation. In a predominantly monolingual text, the use of foreign words may have a ‘domesticating’ or ‘exoticizing’ effect, depending on the way in which the foreign words, alphabets, concepts, translations are incorporated into the text. Moreover, as mentioned above, the sudden appearance of a foreign element in a predominantly monolingual text forces the reader to stop, it influences the rhythm of reading and opens the scope for reader collaboration. In understanding the complex web of relations between different languages in Marçal’s and Fiedorczuk’s texts, it is therefore important to follow the directions in which the movements across language borders occur, the situation of the “foreign” languages as opposed to the predominant language —Polish and Catalan— which serves to construct the literary ‘I’ of the poem, the novel or the short story. Multilingual communication also resembles monolingual language use. In spoken language, the movement between different codes, especially in the form of code-switching or language

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<sup>87</sup> Lonsdale, pp. 10-11.

shifting,<sup>88</sup> may be stereotypically perceived as a sign of insufficient language proficiency, as Barbara Bullock and Aleida Toribio explain. There are, however, numerous kinds of language shifting which, upon closer inspection, turn out to be analogous to monolingual language use:

All speakers selectively draw on the language varieties in their linguistic repertoire, as dictated by their intentions and by the needs of the speech participants and the conversational settings. Even monolinguals are capable of shifting between the linguistic registers and the dialects they command and, as such, there are parallels that can be drawn between monolingual and bilingual language use.<sup>89</sup>

Bullock and Toribio speak of a monolingual ‘style shifting,’ which will constitute an important dimension of my understanding of multilingualism in Fiedorczuk’s and Marçal’s texts. Their comparison inevitably brings to mind the concept of heteroglossia famously coined by Mikhail Bakhtin, who pointed to the inner diversity and heterogeneity of a ‘single’ language when used as a tool to write a novel. For Bakhtin, ‘the style of a novel is to be found in the combination of its style; the language of the novel is the system of its “languages.”’<sup>90</sup> The novel, for Bakhtin,

can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases) – this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre.<sup>91</sup>

The phenomenon of heteroglossia is, then, germane to multilingualism, and, unlike foreign intersections, which occur also in poetry, heteroglossia it is indeed mostly present in Fiedorczuk’s and Marçal’s prose rather than poetic work. The focus on heterogenous linguistic expression, either multilingual or heteroglossic, is, in my view, tied to the heterogenous visions of the nation that both writers display.

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<sup>88</sup> As Barbara Bullock and Almeida Toribio explain, language shifting is defined as ‘segregating’ languages or ‘speaking exclusively in one language in certain domains,’ as opposed to code-switching, which involves switching languages within the same domain, sometimes even in the same sentence. See: Barbara E. Bullock, Almeida Jacqueline Toribio, ‘Themes in the study of code-switching’ in *The Cambridge Handbook of Linguistic Code-Switching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 12.

<sup>89</sup> Bullock, Toribio, p. 12.

<sup>90</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), p. 262.

<sup>91</sup> Bakhtin, pp. 262-263.



In the five chapters that comprise this thesis, I discuss different aspects of the tensions between purity and heterogeneity. I begin Chapter One by laying out the metaphorizations of national languages as a depository of ideas. I also argue that, by speaking of languages in terms of national heritage, of legacy or treasury, we allude to metaphors of commodification that may subject language preservation to the laws of the market. The metaphor of heritage evokes, inheritance, family, and reproduction. Marçal speaks of writing in a minoritized, stateless language such as Catalan as an ‘inherited disadvantage’ which may be compared with the difficulties suffered by women writers. In this sense, language can become hostile to the users that are subject to multiple marginalization. The task of making a language more hospitable consists, firstly, in revisiting some of the symbolic residues that it carries, to make space for more kinds of experiences, identities, and voices. This is especially important in Catalan and just after the end of Francoist regime in Spain, which is when Marçal begins to write. In the chapter, I briefly attend to the debates regarding the ideologies of authenticity and authority in Catalan, as rendered by Kathryn Woolard. I take a look at the metaphorization of maternity in Bonaventura Aribau’s ‘Oda a la pàtria,’ considered the first poem of the Catalan *Renaixença* movement. In the poem, the figure of the mother plays a crucial role in transmitting the Catalan language, but it may also reproduce essentialist and idealized views on motherhood. In Marçal’s texts, there is a deep awareness of the importance to use Catalan as a poetic language in all its registers and dialects, to that it could be preserved and ‘revived’ once again, after years of oppression. However, it is equally important to demystify patriarchal stereotypes regarding women’s place in the family and in society. In her poems, she recuperates and re-elaborates the imagery related to pregnancy and child-bearing, picturing women as active participants in the transmission of culture and attending to the complexities of the mother’s relationship with her newborn child. Another important debate in literature written in Catalan is the debate on the use of language between the representatives of *noucentisme* and *modernisme*. I sketch the debate very briefly, focusing mostly on the figure of Joan Maragall, one of the greatest exponents of Modernist literature in Catalan and an important reference for Marçal, often contrasted with Eugeni d’Ors as the main representative of *noucentisme*. I reflect on Marçal’s re-elaboration of the Maragallian concept of the ‘living word,’ an imperative to use language in all its diversity, including dialects and local variants. Originally inspired both by the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and by the Catholic doctrine, Maragall’s concept is recontextualized by Marçal, who talks about the

exclusion of women from the realm of logos because of the association of femininity with materiality. In Marçal's poetry and essays, the dichotomy between the material and the metaphysical is no longer operant. Rather than divine, life, as well as death, are overwhelmingly material, and so is poetic meaning. The figure of God is substituted by that of the mother, who grants life, and death is presented as an ultimate surrender to become a 'living word.'

Marçal's vision of an inherited disadvantage that women writers in Catalan grapple with is contrasted with Fiedorczuk's critique on the victimizing discourses of Poland. For Fiedorczuk, narratives of Poland as an oppressed nation have led to simplifications of the Polish Romantic legacy which, in turn, has tied the national sentiments to Catholic religion. According to Maria Janion, an important critical reference for Fiedorczuk, the Polish nation has been haunted by the tensions between representing itself as multicultural or homogenous, Eastern or Western; it also has not fully mourned past invasions and oppressions and all the dead, as the Jewish people are often excluded from the national, literary mourning. In her novel *Pod słońcem*, Fiedorczuk recuperates this memory in a multicultural, multilingual account of entangled histories of a town, now Polish, which is contrasted with numerous homogeneizing, supranational enterprises that shaped its history, such as Catholic religion, Esperanto, and Communism. The language of the Communist propaganda has been compared to religion, it is also often compared to the way language is used by contemporary Polish politicians. I discuss Fiedorczuk's reflections on the meaning of independence in the symbolic sense. In a Poland ruled by the far-right Law and Justice party whose narrations of the nation are based on fostering homogeneization through resentment directed at all signs of otherness, the poet invites her readers to imagine other, more constructive forms of patriotism.

In Chapter Two, dedicated to the tensions between nationalism and feminism, I return to Marçal's readings of Maragall's living word. I summarize the poet's views on the exclusion of women from the canon, which she illustrates using metaphors of monstrosity and abjection. Marçal's work has been interpreted as potentially confirmative of essentialist visions of womanhood, associated with the French feminism of difference, which is said to link womanhood with materiality, irrationality, witchcraft, nature, and reproduction. I explore fragments of Marçal's essays and early poems that show a more nuanced vision of feminism and prove the poet's awareness of the cultural constructedness of the gender binary, while also finding inspiration in some of the myths of French feminists such as Hélène Cixous and Luce

Irigaray. If Marçal's work could be read as non-metaphysical, it is because it attempts to cut through established dichotomies. If it speaks of women's irrationality, or even insanity, it is because feminine madness, for Marçal, can become a self-fulfilling prophecy: a deeply rooted stereotype that can make women writers lose their nerves.

I compare Marçal's writings on the exclusion of women from the realm of *logos*, with Fiedorczuk's opinion on the subject. In her articles and essays, Fiedorczuk speaks of women as the Others of the canon. If there are women who enter the canon, they are treated as 'guests' in the realm of literature (Marçal uses the expression 'home honoris causae,' 'honoris causae men' to refer to those women writers),<sup>92</sup> and their work is often misunderstood or 'domesticated' to fit the established tropes of a given language, especially to fit the binary divisions into reason and body, spirit and matter. For Fiedorczuk, Polish poetry, with its metaphors of an invaded, oppressed nation, relies on the figurations of the poet as a genius, witness, or national bard, all of which have been overwhelmingly masculine. I also examine the figurations of Polish suffering metaphorized as violence against women, especially as sexual violence and feminicide. In Fiedorczuk's texts, this tendency is reversed, as rape and the threat of death are presented not as abstract symbols, but as lived, visceral experiences of trauma. The Polish writer also addresses the relationships between patriarchy and anthropocentrism. Among the ecofeminist responses to romanticized and feminized images of "Nature" (deliberately capitalized to indicate the fantasmatic nature of such imagery), Fiedorczuk seems to privilege the post-humanist approaches rather than narratives of 'coming back to nature,' otherwise referred to as goddess feminisms. Fiedorczuk underlines the need to represent non-human reality, to cut through the binary divisions into the feminine and masculine, natural and cultural, bodily and rational. Fiedorczuk opts for representing nature in its specificity, not as an abstract monolith. This also leads to a more productive version of patriotism: instead of an abstract love for the fatherland, Fiedorczuk postulates more respect and curiosity towards the animals and landscapes that belong to Poland just as much as the country's national symbols.

The third chapter is dedicated to Fiedorczuk's and Marçal's work as translators and translation critics. The purpose of including the authors' views on translation and intertextuality in my study is to nuance the vision of a text as assigned to a single author and a single language, but also to enquire about the potential consequences of incorporating translation (as opposed to

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<sup>92</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2020), p. 206.

verbatim, multilingual citations) into the writers' own work. I will rely on metaphors of interconnectedness and interbeing to illustrate Fiedorczuk's and Marçal's understanding of literature as a web of associations and affiliations, of human and non-human affinities. Chapter Four is a continuation of Chapter Three: it aims to explore the uses of 'translation' in Fiedorczuk's and Marçal's texts as a metaphor. Translation will be compared to music, to human and inter-species relationships, it will travel between image and word, between poetry and science.

Finally, in the fifth chapter, I return to the idea of national literatures and languages, introduced in Chapter One. I interrogate the concept of language border, and the crossing of it, in fragments of Marçal's and Fiedorczuk's prose. The idea of a border or delimitation implies the existence of those who exceed definitions, who are excluded, who dwell on the frontiers. In the chapter, I follow the 'outsider' characters in Fiedorczuk's and Marçal's texts —the homeless, the queers, the disabled artists, the working-class employees of a warehouse— who query and indeed 'queer' the understanding of language, pointing to its inner multiplicity, but also to its spatial delimitations, definitions, and pre-conceived orientations.

I should mention that a comparative study such as this one is not aimed, by any means, at producing a like-for-like 'translation' of one writer's work into another's. Quite the contrary – while I do point to numerous similarities and differences between the two authors, between the Polish and Catalan contexts, it is only to suggest that none of the notions that I employ, be it 'language,' 'communication,' 'nation' or 'nationalism' shall be defined once and for all.

## Chapter One: Picture of a Family: Imagining the Nation in Language

Si nuestras previsiones no erran, de aquí a cien años alguien descubrirá los cien tomos de la Segunda Enciclopedia de Tlön. Entonces desaparecerán del planeta el inglés y el francés y el mero español. El mundo será Tlön.

— Jorge Luis Borges (1941)

Tak to już z nim było, z tym profesorem Koniarskim. Jednego dnia mówił jedno, a drugiego — drugie, ale nie kłamał. “Prawdziwym domem człowieka jest język”. Misza pomyślał wtedy, że skoro można żyć w kilku językach, tak jak profesor Koniarski, to znaczy, że można mieć kilka domów — i nie trzeba między nimi wybierać.

— Julia Fiedorczuk (2019)<sup>93</sup>

For Marçal, literature is inevitably entangled with the political circumstances of the writer, and of the language he or she writes in. In this sense, there is no such thing as ‘pure form’ or ‘purely aesthetical criteria’ in defining ‘good literature.’ According to the poet, languages and literatures are never ‘pure’:

Al capdavall, potser no es podria ni fer l’història de la literatura, perquè així que els situem en el temps i en l’espai les obres literàries es contaminen de realitat altra que elles mateixes —però al capdavall, si no fossin contaminades, existirien? No neixen ja “contaminades”? La puresa —tota puresa, com la mort— és estèril. Tot allò que pertany a l’àmbit de la vida és només pura contaminació.<sup>94</sup>

[After all, perhaps the history of literature cannot even be studied, because as soon as literary works are situated in time and space they become *contaminated by a reality other than their own* (emphasis added). But, in the end, were they not contaminated, would they exist at all? Aren’t they born ‘contaminated’ in the first place? Purity —all purity, like death— is sterile. All that which belongs to the realm of life is no more than pure contamination.]

When stating that ‘purity is sterile’ Marçal points to genealogy, to the survival of language through one of the dimensions of language norms: reproduction, an overwhelmingly heteronormative, family-related metaphorization of heritage that, as Natasha Tanna argues,

<sup>93</sup> ‘That’s the way things worked for professor Koniarski. He would say one thing one day and another the next, but he did not lie. “The man’s true home is language.” Misza thought then that if you can live in several languages, like professor Koniarski, it means you can have several homes, no need to choose between them.’ Unless stated otherwise, all translations in this dissertation are mine.

<sup>94</sup> Marçal, Maria-Mercè, *Sota el signe del drac. Proses 1985-1997*, ed. Mercè Ibarz (Barcelona: Proa, 2004), p. 158.

persists and returns: ‘However much it may be criticized and berated, however anachronistic it may seem in some queer contexts, “the family”, no more than “the nation,” will not simply disappear. It persists, often “queerly.”’<sup>95</sup>

For Lakoff, conceptual metaphors are employed when concepts from one domain are discussed using the language from another domain,<sup>96</sup> for example when the language of family relationships, or economy is used in a debate related to normative linguistics or politics. Conceptual metaphors, thus, can be defined in simple terms as ‘concepts from a typically concrete realm of thought that are used to comprehend another, completely different domain.’<sup>97</sup> As Lakoff points out, the metaphor of nation-as-family or state-as-family is very present in the political discourse.<sup>98</sup> But the family metaphor does not appear ‘as such;’ it adopts form of specific family models with particular, often clearly gendered roles. In the present chapter, I explore some of the metaphoric codifications of family on which the links between language and nation are founded.

The sense of a national, linguistic and cultural belonging, reflected, refracted and deformed in literature, remains intensely linked to an imagined fraternity, a sovereign comradeship which makes it possible, in Benedict Anderson’s words, ‘not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.’<sup>99</sup> National community, as can be observed in Anderson’s mention of ‘fraternity,’ is often imagined or metaphorized as family, not only in terms of affiliation but also regarding shared traditions and heritage. There is, of course, not only the ‘nuclear family’ of the nation, but also the ‘extended family’ of Europe, of Iberian and Slavonic cultural realms, of Romance and Slavonic languages. As Arthur Terry observes,

At various stages in Catalan history, this sense of identity has existed within the context of some larger political unit: Carolingian France, Aragon, Spain. This makes for many of the tensions and difficulties which still beset Catalan writers and which give the best contemporary literature its most characteristic flavour.<sup>100</sup>

While Terry mentions ‘the very distinctive nature of Catalan society compared with the rest of the Peninsula and [...] the obvious European quality which goes with the best features of its

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<sup>95</sup> Tanna, p. 32.

<sup>96</sup> Lakoff, ‘Metaphor, Morality, and Politics’, p. 177.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>99</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London/New York: Verso, 2006), p. 7.

<sup>100</sup> Arthur Terry, *A Companion to Catalan Literature* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2003), p. VIII.

society and literature,’<sup>101</sup> Maria Janion (1926-2020), renowned literary critic and feminist, describes the Polish symbolic identification with the European realm as much more conflicted:

Między Zachodem łacińskim a Wschodem greckim, między Rzymem a Bizancjum zaczęła przebiegać przed tysiącem lat linia podziału religijno-kulturalnego, która bywa uznawana “za najtrwalszą granicę kulturalną kontynentu europejskiego”.<sup>102</sup> [...] Polska znalazła się w położeniu zachodnio-wschodnim; jak to określa ironicznie Sławomir Mrożek: na wschód od Zachodu i na zachód od Wschodu.<sup>103</sup>

[Between the Latin West and the Greek East, between Rome and Byzantium, a line of cultural and religious division was established a thousand years ago, a line which may be considered as ‘the most durable cultural border on the European continent.’ [...] Poland found itself in a western-eastern position or, as Sławomir Mrożek ironically put it, east from the West and west from the East.]

The contemporary consequences of the ‘cultural and religious division,’ which Janion mentions, between the East and the West, is acknowledged by numerous Polish authors. In *Rodzinna Europa* (‘Family-like Europe’, translated into English as ‘Native Realm’), Czesław Miłosz (1911-2004, Polish Nobel prize winner and one of the leading poets of the twentieth century) describes the conflicted feelings of familiarity and otherness that he experienced on a trip to Switzerland, where he is perceived as a stranger who arrived from distant, mythical lands:

doznałem podwójnych uczuć, tubylca i cudzoziemca. Niewątpliwie i tu była moja ojczyzna, ale wyrzekająca się [...] wiedzy o sobie jako całości, dzieląca swoją ludność na rodzinę, skłóconą, ale rodzinę, i ubogich kuzynów. Ileż to razy miałem usta zamknięte dlatego właśnie, że wyłoniwszy się z mglistych obszarów, o których podręczniki i książki rzadko podają wiadomość, a jeżeli, to fałszywą, musiałbym zaczynać od początku.<sup>104</sup>

[I had a dual feeling of a native and a foreigner. Certainly, here too was my fatherland, a fatherland that rejected [...] the knowledge of itself as a whole, that divided its peoples into family —conflicted, but still family— and poor cousins. How many times have I kept my mouth shut precisely because, having emerged from those hazy regions, of which manuals and books rarely give information, and if they do, it is false, I would have to start from the beginning.]

The uncanny feeling that the poet describes stems from the fact that he experiences ‘Western Europe’ as both familiar and foreign. While describing Europe as ‘family,’ Miłosz observes that

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Jerzy Kłoczowski, *Młodsza Europa. Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w kręgu cywilizacji chrześcijańskiej średniowiecza* (Warszawa 2003), p. 12.

<sup>103</sup> Maria Janion, *Niesamowita słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2007) p. 11.

<sup>104</sup> Czesław Miłosz, *Rodzinna Europa* (Warszawa: Polityka Spółdzielnia Pracy, 2001), p. 12.

within the family, certain hierarchies exist. This chapter, in which I am comparing, quite uncommonly, a Polish and a Catalan writer, in a way also constitutes an attempt to ‘start from the beginning,’ for within the family of Europe some cousins are more rarely in touch than others.

### **Heritage, Inheritance, Patrimony: Language as a Depository of Ideas**

Fiedorczuk imagines language, the product of the body and of culture, as means of spatial linking between a community and a territory, which she explores in the poem ‘Lądy i oceany’ (‘Lands and Oceans’). ‘The poem, as Fiedorczuk reveals, was a consequence of a discovery or a thought about the fact that humans need land, among other things, in order to bury the dead. Of course, we could bury a person in the ocean, but it would be difficult to build a grave there. The tomb—or the tombstone—is called *séma* in a transcription from Greek, and the same word is used to refer to a “sign” or “mark,” also a linguistic sign, which constitutes the beginning of any culture.<sup>105</sup> The etymological connection of “tomb” and “sign,” which Fiedorczuk refers to, both encompassed by the Greek *séma*, is preserved both Polish (in words such as *semantyka*, semantics, or *semiotyka*, semiotics) and Catalan (*signe*: sign, *significat*: meaning, *semàntica*: semantics, *semiòtica*: semiotics) as a residue of the past cross-lingual migration from Latin to Polish and the past bifurcation of Latin into Catalan and other Romance languages. In as much as the process of assigning meanings to words is linked to ritual, such as burying the dead, it also aims to create social cohesion. Imagining a national community remits to “the dead,” those that came before, it relies on the pre-existing, symbolic sediments in language. Just as the rocks or the geological strata provide an account of the Earth’s history, culture, according to Fiedorczuk, can be seen as a layered surface, as the accumulated words and actions of the deceased. Language, as means of codifying meaning, becomes, thus, fundamental to build a community, to form links between those who inhabit a territory and distinguish them from others;<sup>106</sup> it also becomes linked to culturally established understandings of kinship. This definition of language is in line with the etymology of heritage in Polish. Heritage or ‘spuścizna’ (as Maciej Malinowski, blogger specialized in linguistic correctness, explains, ‘spuścizna’ was earlier pronounced ‘puścizna’) comes from ‘pustka’ (‘emptiness’) and refers to the emptiness left by a lost

<sup>105</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, ‘Meeting with the poet,’ online video recording, YouTube, 3 July 2011  
<[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izJ6Cag-\\_Cw&t=13s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izJ6Cag-_Cw&t=13s)> [accessed 3 August 2020]

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.



relative.<sup>107</sup> The synonyms are *scheda*, which comes from the Greek *schedē* ('a sheet of paper') and *dziedzictwo* that comes from 'dziedziczyć' ('to inherit.') Language, thus, contains or constitutes an inheritance that substitutes the dead ancestors and ensures the continuity and coherence of a group.

An understanding of language as national heritage is often expressed by normative linguists – in less poetic although equally metaphoric ways. Andrzej Markowski, one of the leading normative linguists of Polish, understands language as a field of knowledge: a system not merely of empty or neutral signs but of culturally laden values. Markowski metaphorizes language as a national “treasury” or “depository of ideas” in which the history of a linguistic community is preserved and perpetuated. The work of the normative linguist, for Markowski, entails preserving linguistic and cultural heritage.<sup>108</sup> However, as Pere Comelles observes, the consequences of metaphorizing language as patrimony may not always be helpful in terms of language preservation. For Comelles,

si les llengües es patrimonialitzen, si es defineixen com a béns, pot sorgir la qüestió de la propietat (i de l’apropiació), que implica el del cost del manteniment, el dels beneficis d’una possible explotació, etc.<sup>109</sup>

if languages are considered patrimony, if they are defined as goods, the question of property, and appropriation, may arise, which implies the problems of the cost of language maintenance and the advantages of a possible exploitation.

In other words, if languages are commodified, their existence, survival and thriving is subject to the laws of supply and demand – if not indeed to those of the survival of the “fittest,” politically and economically.

Marçal’s idea of an inherited disadvantage illustrates multiple identity conflicts, not only related to gender, that are concealed behind the naturalized vision of ‘passing on a name’ or a language, which is never as ‘pure’ as it may seem. The metaphors of heritage and inheritance also point to survival —of a language, a tradition, or the memory of a ‘lineage’— beyond death. The perpetuation, preservation and reproduction of norms and values in language, understood as ‘heritage’ or ‘field of knowledge’ contains an important generative dimension, entangled in the

<sup>107</sup> Maciej Malinowski, ‘Spuszczina (kiedys puszczina),’ *Obcy język polski, blog o poprawnej polszczyźnie od 2002 roku*, internet blog entry <<https://obcyjezykpolski.pl/spuszczina-kiedys-puszczina>> [accessed 25 June 2021]

<sup>108</sup> Andrzej Markowski, *Kultura języka polskiego* (Warszawa: PWN, 2007), p. 12.

<sup>109</sup> Pere Comelles Casanova, *Contra l’imperialisme lingüístic: A favor de la linguodiversitat* (Barcelona: La Campana, 2006), p. 14.

metaphorics of family, familiarity, communality. Even as they transmit different visions of “heritage” or “patrimony,” of what the community of Polish or Catalan language speakers is or does, the language norm transmits rules, patterns and referents according to which the norm is to be reproduced and perpetuated. Those rules of using a language (and the cultural values associated with it) correctly are regulated by the norms of what Markowski calls ‘*kultura języka polskiego*’ (‘the culture of Polish language’). The idea of the ‘culture of the Polish language’ as used by Markowski and other scholars, is one of the most commonly deployed ideas in Polish normative linguistics. It may be understood in multiple ways, sometimes divergent and sometimes intertwined. Firstly, the “culture of the language” means, according to Markowski, ‘the skills of speaking and writing *correctly* and *efficiently*, in accordance with the rules, norms and stylistic patterns accepted in a given community.’<sup>110</sup> Secondly, again according to Markowski, ‘the culture of the language’ entails efforts to preserve and promote it in a given society by issuing, for example, orthoepic dictionaries or giving advice on proper usage. In other words, to speak the language correctly, one needs to “speak” the culture in its normative version.

However, the application of the word “culture” implicitly constructs the users of the standard language as cultured, that is to say, as ‘refined, improved by exposure to intellectual culture,’ and as “cultivated,” meaning ‘developed under controlled natural conditions,’<sup>111</sup> as people who presumably care about history and intellectual tradition and who strive to preserve them as *national* values. The narrative of linguistic correctness as the ‘culture of the Polish language’ can hardly be separated from its connotations of power. For example, the narrative of ‘language culture’ tends to devalue speakers of argots, sociolects and regional versions of Polish. The implied “threat” that serves to exclude non-standard Polish from the realm of the official communication —also from the realm of literature, a conviction actively challenged by Szczepan Twardoch,<sup>112</sup> a writer from the region of Śląsk (Silesia) who used Silesian in two of his novels

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<sup>110</sup> Markowski, *Kultura*, p. 15, emphasis added. It should be noted that Markowski’s understanding of efficiency could be further complicated, since correctness is not perforce efficient or efficiency perforce correct —slang may be more “efficient” but not necessarily correct —. Efficiency, thus, reflects a certain hierarchy of speakers: the group of users of a slang, a jargon or a dialect is implicitly regarded as unimportant, it is minoritized.

<sup>111</sup> ‘Culture,’ in *Online Etymology Dictionary* <<https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=culture>> [accessed: 24 June 2021]

<sup>112</sup> There are of course many more writers who challenge the notion of the ‘culture of Polish language,’ for example Małgorzata Masłowska, who wrote *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* (2002, translated into English as ‘White and Red’) using deliberately ‘vulgar’ or ‘uncultured’ argots of Polish; so did Michał Witkowski for example in his novels *Margot* (2009), which imitates the language of truck drivers, the gay novels *Lubiewo* (2004) and *Drwal* (2011, ‘Lumberjack’), and many others.

and who persistently uses Silesian on his social media— is that of disrespecting the tradition, the ethics of language, and the ‘inherently Polish’ values. The perception of a “dialect” is often explicitly related to prejudice regarding the speakers’ social background and education. By way of example, a famous linguist, Jan Miodek, in an interview on the standardization of Silesian describes the debate on the minoritized status of Silesian as ‘nonsense’ or ‘embarrassing.’<sup>113</sup> For Miodek, Silesian does not serve to phrase abstract, philosophical concepts because that ‘would sound grotesque.’<sup>114</sup>

The word patrimony, on the other hand, originally meant ‘property of the Church,’ also ‘spiritual legacy of Christ,’ (in mid-14c. English it was pronounced *patrimoine*) comes from Old French (*patremoine*), meaning ‘heritage, patrimony’ (12c.) and directly from Latin *patrimonium* – ‘a paternal estate, inheritance from a father.’<sup>115</sup> In Catalan, the etymology is the same as in English.<sup>116</sup> Inheriting the national values through language is thus metaphorized as a gift from the father – earthly or divine, presumably to the male members of the community who will then pass on the inheritance to their sons. The patriarchal symbolism of language as national heritage is not only present in the metaphors, but also in the linguistic norms. For instance, the Polish normative linguists, Danuta Buttler, Halina Kurkowska and Halina Satkiewicz<sup>117</sup> are radically opposed to marking feminine gender in language. The three scholars in question, all women, define the ‘culture of the Polish language’ as synonymous to standardized, traditional linguistic correctness. In illustrating their arguments, Buttler, Kurkowska and Satkiewicz use masculine forms as non-marked.<sup>118</sup> The feminine gender is marked as other by the morpheme ‘k’, used to

<sup>113</sup> Teresa Semik, ‘Jan Miodek: Dyskusja o języku śląskim w piśmie jest żenująca,’ *Dziennik zachodni* (2011) <<http://www.dziennikzachodni.pl/artykul/384010.jan-miodek-dyskusja-o-jezyku-slaskim-w-pismie-jest-zenujaca,id,t.html>> [accessed 21 April 2020]

<sup>114</sup> He says: ‘Nie można w gwarze śląskiej wypowiedzieć abstrakcyjnych, filozoficznych treści? Nie można, bo brzmi to groteskowo.’ Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> ‘Patrimony,’ in *Online Etymology Dictionary* <<https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=patrimony>> [accessed 25 June 2021]

<sup>116</sup> See: ‘patrimoni,’ in *diccionari.cat* <<http://www.diccionari.cat/lexicx.jsp?GECART=0101060>> [accessed 25 June 2021]

<sup>117</sup> Danuta Buttler, Halina Kurkowska, Halina Satkiewicz, *Kultura języka polskiego: Zagadnienia poprawności gramatycznej* (Warszawa: PWN, 1971).

<sup>118</sup> ‘Student pożyczył koledze ciekawą książkę’ (‘A student lent an interesting book to a friend,’ where both ‘friend’: kolega and ‘student’: student are masculine nouns) is quoted as ‘any sentence’ or ‘a random sentence.’ The masculine form of the word ‘student’ is defined as ‘the one who studies in an institution of higher education’ and the masculine for ‘friend’ as ‘the one who is someone’s companion of work, study or play.’ The word ‘companion’ is also cited in its masculine form, due to the fact that, according to the norms of Polish, the masculine of a personal noun is regarded as its basic form, and the feminine as variation. The authors of the book do not mention the rule in question; instead they opt for implication, which shifts the rule in question to the ground of “common knowledge” or “common sense.”

create the feminine of certain words, such as ‘klientka’, ‘petentka’, ‘pasazerka’, all of which are defined by the authors as ‘the woman who...’<sup>119</sup> As the authors assert, the language system does allow for the creation of feminine forms of, for example, *minister* (the example of the feminine the authors give is ‘*ministerka*’) and such a form would be ‘undoubtedly understandable,’ but the authors nonetheless consider it *uncommon* in Polish. The authors claim that if a language user decides to use the language in accordance with the possibilities granted by the language system, creating inexistent, uncommon, but theoretically possible forms, such use may ‘offend’ or at least ‘surprise’ their interlocutor – the cultured speaker of Polish.<sup>120</sup> In other words, although systemically a feminine form is possible and understandable, the community of ‘cultured’ Polish speakers does not, in practice, allow for a minister to exist in a feminine form. (Of course, queer theory might question the male-female binary division to begin with.)<sup>121</sup>

Similar debates take place in the Catalan language. Carme Junyent, for one, argues that ‘tot plegat sorgeix de la confusió entre els conceptes de sexe —que és un tret biològic dels éssers vius— i gènere —categoria gramatical que afecta el substantiu i en determina les concordances—’<sup>122</sup> (‘a confusion arises between the concepts of sex, which is a biological feature of living beings, and gender, which is a grammatical category that affects the noun and the concordance.’) Junyent’s statement may be useful to argue against creating feminine forms of inanimate nouns. It goes without saying that a table or a door knob has no sex of their own; in the case of humans, however, the grammatical category tends to reflect the person’s gender, often as perceived by others, not only as a grammatical but also a culturally constructed label.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, Junyent’s deployment of sex/gender is both “common,” accepted and communalized as an unmarked origin of community organization, and flawed, inasmuch as the “biological traits”

<sup>119</sup> Buttler, Kurkowska, Satkiewicz, p. 15.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> See, for instance: Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1944).

<sup>122</sup> Bell Zaballa, ‘Carme Junyent: “Que s’acabi aquesta comèdia de desdoblar en masculí i femení”’ *Vileaweb* (2013) <<https://www.vilaweb.cat/noticia/4153027/20131031/carme-junyent-sacabi-comedia-desdoblar-masculi-femeni.html>> [accessed 21 April 2020]

<sup>123</sup> Of course, the linguistic debate on gender in Catalan is much more complex and not reduced to the simple dichotomy between the feminine and masculine. There are linguists who do acknowledge the need for the language to reflect a larger spectrum of identities and who are working to increase the inclusivity of Catalan. See, for instance, the following summary by Catalunya Radio: Montse Camps, ‘El català acabarà tenint un gènere neutre per a les persones no binàries?’ in: *Catalunya Migdia* (June 2021) <<https://www.ccma.cat/catradio/catalunya-migdia/el-catala-acabara-tenint-un-genere-neutre-per-a-les-persones-no-binariesa/noticia/3107203/?fbclid=IwAR2V9Str5xIBTZq16YRQChs274zppGz5GEdcJ4L0U0ZGIONUwa0dz-cosKs>> [accessed: 25 June 2021]

that gender categories refer to are always already social and linguistic. In cases in which there are no double forms, especially of names of jobs and academic titles, Junyent argues that sometimes the result of creating feminine forms is “ridiculous,” and instead of giving visibility to women it contributes to belittle them (for instance, if we were to call a woman pilot *la pilota*, ‘a ball’).<sup>124</sup> Michał Rusinek, poet, language scholar, secretary of the Nobel prize-winning Wisława Szymborska, responds to such arguments by noting that the perception of “funniness” or “oddness” in language is a question of habit or custom, of embedded practice. In fact, he claims, it was only during the Communist period in Poland that feminine titles were systemically eliminated from the language.<sup>125</sup> When it comes to the imposition of certain forms of language behavior, which Junyent also criticizes, Rusinek affirms the following:

‘Nie jestem za tym, żeby formy żeńskie narzucać na siłę, żeby od dziś wszystkie kobiety chirurdzy były „chirurgkami”. Jestem natomiast za tym, żeby kobiety mogły sobie wybrać, jak chcą być nazywane. Chcę, żeby była tzw. oboczność, czyli poprawność dwóch, a czasem nawet kilku form. Polski język na to pozwala.

I do not support the idea of imposing feminine forms on women, so that starting today all female surgeons must call themselves “surgeonesses.” But I do think that women should be able to choose the way in which they want to be addressed, and I want both or even more forms to be considered as correct. Polish language allows for this.’<sup>126</sup>

The tension, thus, is between choice and imposition. For Marçal, the patriarchal normativity of linguistic norms affects literary production, and contributes to the invisibility of women, queer writers, or working-class language users in literary canons. The poet describes her perception of a certain hostility in language, different from the resistance that masculine writers experience when confronted with a blank page. As the poet claims, women struggle with ‘una hostilitat més persistent:

cada cop que se’m planteja la possibilitat d’escriure la paraula “tothom,” per exemple. Cada cop que miro el diccionari i el masculí priva sobre el femení. Cada cop que he de fer un plural mixt. Per exemple “pares” per “pare i mare.” I així successivament.’<sup>127</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Michał Rusinek, Natalia Waloch, ‘Kim będzie mąż prezydentki? W pierwszym mężu pobrzmiewa rozwód i powtórne zamążpójście,’ *Wysokie Obcasy* (8 December 2018) <<http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/7,53668,24243838,michal-rusinek-skoro-mamy-aktora-i-aktorke-i-to-nam-nie.html>> [accessed 21 April 2020]

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> In Catalan: ‘tothom,’ which etymologically comes from *tot*, ‘every’ and *hom*, ‘man.’

[Every time that I look into the dictionary and the masculine overrules the feminine. Every time that I have to make a mixed plural. For instance “parents” for “mother and father.” And so on and so forth.']

‘Pares’ in Catalan literally means ‘fathers’ and figuratively stands for parents, and ‘tothom’ etymologically comes from *tot*, ‘every’ and *hom*, ‘man.’ Marçal points to the psychological impact of metaphorizing the masculine form as ‘universal’ or unmarked and the feminine as a marker of difference. When stating that the language feels ‘hostile’ to her as a woman writer, rather than announcing linguistic relativism, she points to the affective associations caused by the metaphorical residues of patriarchy that the speakers of Catalan ‘inherit,’ and that causes discomfort. These sensations of comfort and discomfort affect the subject’s sense of belonging, contributing to define in which speakers inhabit their language. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed posits the relationship between the experience of comfort, of being accommodated in social space, as if ‘sinking in to a comfortable chair’ and the culturally constructed affects that underlie and delimit the feeling of comfort. The comfortable norms are understood as social scripts that tie together the (hetero)normative love, reproduction, and the affective construction of nations. The feeling of discomfort in a space shaped by such norms produces ‘queer feelings.’ One of such ‘(un)comfortable chairs’ is language. It is through language that affects become attached to images, and the history of these attachments lives on in national languages.<sup>128</sup>

For instance, in her introduction to her translation of a book of short stories by Colette, Marçal tells the story of Colette’s father, a former soldier, who left behind him dozens of notebooks upon his death. The volumes, carefully ordered and preserved, presumably contained the soldier’s collected memories. Surprisingly enough, when unpacked, the imagined memoirs contained nothing but blank pages. Marçal styles the anecdote as ‘the victorious inheritance of Colette’s father’s phantasmagoric writing.’<sup>129</sup> What the Catalan poet refers to as “masculine aphasia” has paved the path, paradoxically, for Colette to establish herself as an author, as a woman who writes. Colette was later instigated by her husband Henry Gauthier-Villars, a frustrated writer himself, to write under his nickname, Willy, at once breaking through the paternalistic confines that restrict women’s access to writing and giving up, at least temporarily,

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<sup>128</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Edinburgh University Press/ Routledge, 2004), p. 155.)

<sup>129</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2004), p. 48.

her identity as a writer.<sup>130</sup> Colette was thus connected to the male writers who do not or cannot write, and so she wrote herself, occupying an empty space left by the men who could not claim it. As if, to apply Ahmed's metaphor, she were sitting in a chair designed to accommodate other kinds of bodies that do not resemble hers. In Marçal's work, women, along with other others, represent the work of the subjects who "feel queer" and who, actively or not, "queer" the Catalan (and Spanish) imagery (re)constructed in language.

Marçal likens the minoritization of women in the cultural and especially literary canon to the minoritization of writers in smaller languages in the wider, perhaps Iberian or European, context. Marçal sees Catalan as 'una llengua que ha estat inferioritzada durant segles, abolida de les instàncies de poder, i en certa manera, doncs, "feminitzada"...'<sup>131</sup> ('a language that has been made inferior for ages, abolished from the realm of power and thus, in a way, "feminized"...') For Marçal, writing in a minoritized language for a woman poet (but also a lesbian, a single mother, a working-class woman) implies a continuous struggle against multiple minoritization:

el paral·lelisme entre llengua minoritzada i dona, com a grup social minoritzat, em sembla més pertinent del que pugui semblar a primera vista. No en faré cap anàlisi: només m'hi refereixo, aquí, per indicar que una situació de desavantatge heretada demana, certament, la intervenció decidida de la voluntat i de mesures concretes perquè tingui cap possibilitat de canviar.<sup>132</sup>

[the parallel between 'minoritized language' and 'woman', a minoritized social group, appears more pertinent than it may seem at first glance. I will not offer an analysis of it: I only mention it here to indicate that a situation of inherited disadvantage certainly demands a decidedly willful intervention and tangible measures if there is to be any chance for a change]

Women, whose literary creation was and often still is considered a sub-category in the literary canon in spite of the fact that they constitute, roughly speaking, half of the world's population, could thus be compared to writers who write in Catalan in the Catalan-speaking regions. As Junyent observes, 'és fàcil oblidar que només som minoritaris si mirem cap a l'estat, però crec que podem prescindir d'intermediaris i contemplar solidàriament la diversitat lingüística del món,'<sup>133</sup> ('it is easy to forget that we are only a minority if we look to the state, but I think that we can dispense of intermediaries and contemplate language diversity in the world from a place

<sup>130</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2004), p. 49.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>133</sup> Maria-Carme Junyent i Figueres, *Les llengües del món. Ecolingüística*, (Barcelona: Empúries, 1996), p. 8.

of solidarity.’) After all, the minoritized situation of Catalan does not necessarily have to do with its number of speakers —Catalan boasts with a larger population than, for example, Estonian or Slovak, or Norwegian<sup>134</sup>— but with the conceptualization of Catalonia as a hierarchically bilingual region. Normativization, for minoritized languages, entails the setting of boundaries and limitations, which may have protective function against the influence of the hegemonic Spanish, but it may also be limiting, as demonstrated above, for example for women and queer persons within the minoritized tradition, who inhabit their languages less comfortably, as if they were guests in a space that was built to accommodate others.

The inheritance of disadvantage relates back to family relationships and to the passing on of heritage, as is in evidence in Marçal’s search for the “literary genealogies” of the women writers not only within Catalan letters, but among all women she read, translated and rewrote. The poet dedicated a significant part of her life to the search for *mares literàries*, literary “mothers” or predecessors, whom she researched and with whom she dialogued extensively. Women writers, thus, are metaphorized as a ‘family’ of choice, based on common values rather than a straight line of descent. Literature written by women, in Marçal’s view, constitutes an example of potential, trans-lingual literary dialogues. Given the relative dearth of female predecessors or literary “mothers,” Marçal speaks of a discontinuity or “orphanity” within institutionalized literary genealogies that are overwhelmingly centered on men and their works:

Perquè, si és cert, com diu Virginia Woolf, que els llibres segueixen els uns als altres, tot i la nostra tendència d’analitzar-los per separat, els llibres de les dones —és a dir, els llibres que elaboren des de dins l’experiència del gènere femení— presenten una disconuïtat desconcertant. Aquesta disconuïtat és més aparent que real, almenys durant aquests darrers segles: però cada generació de dones sembla començar de zero. [...] És que les institucions segueixen essent masculines, i la Literatura és una institució.”<sup>135</sup>

[Because if what Virginia Woolf says is true, if books follow each other, in spite of our tendency to analyze them separately, then books written by women —those books that explore the experience of the feminine gender from the inside—present a disconcerting discontinuity. This discontinuity is more apparent than real, at least in recent centuries, but every generation of women seems to start from scratch. [...] For the institutions are still masculine, and Literature is an institution.]

The image of books “following” one another, as in some kind of intergenerational line, suggests interaction between different women writers and their works. Through the very act of selection

<sup>134</sup> For more precise data see <Ethnologue.com>.

<sup>135</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2004), p. 192.



and juxtaposition, Marçal establishes connections between texts, connections that are in themselves interpretations. In Marçal's personal, yet still extra-personal genealogy, her own work, and her vision of literature, remains dialogically "affiliated" with other women writers, avoiding conventional lines of "heritage" or inheritance, but instead inviting readers to question the ways in which literary genealogies exist in space and time.<sup>136</sup>

### **'He desat la ruda al calaix': Motherhood, Heritage, Authenticity**

As mentioned in the introduction, it is right after Franco dies when Marçal begins to publish. When in 1971 Marçal was forced by her family to marry the poet Ramon Pinyol Balasch (because they were "caught" by her father having spent the night in the same apartment),<sup>137</sup> less than a decade had passed since the possibility of killing an unfaithful wife or underaged daughter was abolished from the Spanish criminal code, where it was reintroduced by Franco's government in 1944.<sup>138</sup> Still, it was not until 1978 that feminine "adultery" was eliminated from the penal code and was not punished with prison anymore, which constituted one of the many goals of the Spanish feminists of the transition period.

As Joana Sabadell Nieto observes, Francoist nationalism linked the state to the (heteronormative) family, conveyed in the 'sinister trilogy' of *familia, municipio y sindicato* (family, municipality and syndicate), the three 'natural entities' upon which the Francoist National Movement was ideologically founded, to 'reproduce the centralization of authority of the Francoist organic state.'<sup>139</sup> In Marçal's childhood and youth women could not work and receive a salary without their husband's permission; they were regarded as underaged until the age of twenty one (previously twenty five)<sup>140</sup> and not allowed to move out from their father's home while "underaged." They also unable to receive inheritance.<sup>141</sup>

One of the important motifs that she adopts to represent the new, inclusive Catalan nation after Francoism is motherhood, which constituted one of the central symbol used by the regime to deprive women of agency, and which Marçal used to redefine the transmission of culture and

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<sup>136</sup> For an exhaustive analysis of Marçal's queer genealogy-creating techniques see: Tanna, *Queer Genealogies in Transnational Barcelona*.

<sup>137</sup> Julià, pp. 83-85.

<sup>138</sup> Nekane Jurado, *Lucharon contra el patriarcado: mujeres libres* (Iruña: Eusko Lurra Fundazioa, 2017), p. 327.

<sup>139</sup> Sabadell Nieto, p. 334.

<sup>140</sup> Julià, p. 84.

<sup>141</sup> Montserrat Palau, 'La mística de la feminitat franquista a la narrativa de Maria Aurèlia Capmany,' *Catalan Review*, Vol. VII, issue 2 (1993), p. 73.

language. For Alfons Gregori, Marçal's poems dedicated to maternity are crucial to understanding the embodied poetic subject that Marçal proclaimed:

Ciało nie tylko staje się przedmiotem snutej przez głos liryczny refleksji dotyczącej granic między umysłem a narządami zmysłów, lecz odzyskuje również pierwszoplanowość jako część podmiotowego ja, w opozycji do pojęcia logosu dominującego w obszarze intelektualnym od czasów starożytnych.<sup>142</sup>

[The body not only becomes the subject of the reflection weaved by the lyrical voice on the limits between the mind and the sensual organs, but it also regains its protagonism as part of a subjective 'I', as opposed to the notion of *logos* that has dominated the intellectual realm since Antiquity.]

In *La germana, l'estrangera*, Marçal links the metaphor of reproduction to choice. Many of Marçal's poems can be read against a naturalized image of the mother, for instance the pro-choice 'Ruda' ['Rue'] from the volume *Sal oberta*. Rue is a herb that was once considered an abortive plant. Marçal writes: 'He desat al calaix la ruda: se'm podria a les butxaques,'<sup>143</sup> ('I have put away the rue in a drawer: it was rotting in my pockets.') The poem reflects the author's real-life dilemmas: faced with the threat of social exclusion, Marçal still chose to become a single mother, to walk the streets with 'un ventre altiu que gosa navegar | en aigües de ningú contra llei de corrent,'<sup>144</sup> ('an elevated stomach that dares to sail | the waters of no one against the laws of the current,') as she writes in *Sal oberta*. The right to choose, for her, included not only the right to terminate a pregnancy, but also not to do so. As the poet recalls, even though abortion was illegal in Spain at the time she got pregnant, in her social circles it was considered more appropriate to travel and have it done elsewhere than to have a baby out of wedlock. She describes the process of deciding to give birth to her daughter, and to name her Heura (Ivy), as follows:

Segons les lleis del món, el que hauria d'haver fet és agafar la maleta i anar a Londres a avortar; per la situació. Però vaig tenir una mena de sensació molt forta d'una cosa que m'agafava i no em deixava. I jo vaig visualitzar l'heura; i va ser molt al principi que vaig visualitzar aquest nom.<sup>145</sup>

[According to the laws of the world, what I should have done was to pack a suitcase and go to London, and have an abortion, because of the situation. But I had a very strong

<sup>142</sup> Gregori i Gomis, 'Maria-Mercè Marçal, la miglior fabbra,' pp. 133-134.

<sup>143</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 202.

<sup>144</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 196.

<sup>145</sup> Julià, p. 212.

sensation of a thing that took hold of me and would not let go. And I visualized it as ivy, and it was at the very beginning that I visualized this name.]

The poet's decision caused a scandal in her family and among the fellow members of the *Nacionalistes d'Esquerra* ('Leftwing Nationalists') party, where she was actively involved at the time and where she had met the father of the baby.<sup>146</sup> Marçal, however, decided to go through motherhood on her own terms and write about it in her poetry. This gesture – apart from its importance as an act of hospitality, in which the author invites her readers into her life, pointing to the deeply political dimension of women's personal decisions – could also be read in the context of the metaphors of motherhood in the debate on transmitting Catalan and reinstating its importance as a language of public life. For Kathryn Woolard, the metaphors of the 'natural' played a pivotal role in what she refers to as 'ideology of authenticity,' used to justify the importance of reinstating Catalan as a language of public spaces after Francoism:

In response to the form of Spanish cultural and linguistic nationalism established under Franco, almost every political party in Catalonia supported reinstatement of Catalan language as part a program for justice in the transition to democracy at the end of the dictatorship in the mid-1970s. There was a sweeping social and political consensus [in Catalonia] for the institutional recovery of Catalan expressed in the public sphere and voices raised against it were restricted to the political margins. Catalanist activism during the political transition and early autonomy drew strongly —although certainly not exclusively— on an ideology of authenticity, in that it championed a territorially rooted linguistic identity framed as authentic and natural to Catalonia. Activists saw this identity as repressed but not undone but an artificial imposition of Castilian linguistic dominance by the Spanish state.<sup>147</sup>

Authenticity, in Woolard's terms, as opposed to anonymity, consists in perceiving a language's primary function in terms as preserving the identity of an individual or a community of speakers, often at the expense of the referential values expressed in such language. Anonymity, on the other hand, depicts a language, usually a powerful or widely diffused one, as most apt to express "universal" rather than "particular" content, thus endowing such language with an authority that is styled as timeless and universal. Thus, 'anonymous languages supposedly can be learned by anyone, but authentic languages can be learned by no one; speakers are supposed to come by them "naturally", i.e. be born into them, rather than working to acquire them.'<sup>148</sup> The "authentic"

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<sup>146</sup> Julià, p. 214.

<sup>147</sup> Kathryn Ann Woolard, *Singular and Plural: Ideologies of Linguistic Authority in 21st Century Catalonia* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 40.

<sup>148</sup> Woolard, p. 24.

languages, which presumably undergird and foster community, are thus depicted as “natural,” and “particular,” they can be metaphorized as products of the body, while the “universal” languages, which count with more authority, are “artificial”: they remit to the domain of “reason” and “universality.”

To represent a language as a natural, almost biological attribute that consolidates a community is not only an element of linguistic activism, but also a literary trope already present throughout the literary history of Catalan. To quote just one example, Bonaventura Carles Aribau’s famous poem ‘La pàtria,’ published in 1833 in the journal *El Vapor* and considered the first manifestation of *Renaixença*, linked the preservation of language and nation to metaphors of inheritance, family, reproduction, and nourishment. Language played a pivotal role in the visions of the “rebirth” of the Catalan nation in the *Renaixença*, the literary and cultural movement which was developed in the nineteenth century and which posited a “rebirth” of Catalan as a language of literature and culture, after ages of Castilian dominance that began in the fifteenth century.<sup>149</sup>

In writing about the language, Aribau relies on family-related metaphors, situating Catalan within the realm of a mother-child relationship and implicitly communicating that its inculcation is dependent on the traditional role of the mother as the primary care-giver: The poem reads: ‘En llemosí sonà lo meu primer vagit, | quan del mugró matern la dolça llet bevia; | en llemosí al Senyor pregava cada dia, | e càntics llemosins somiava cada nit’<sup>150</sup> (‘In Limousin my first cry sounded out, | When from the motherly nipple I drank the sweet milk; | In Limousin to the Lord I prayed every day, | And I dreamt of Limousin hymns each night.’) In ‘La pàtria,’ Catalan is not mentioned specifically, only *llengua llemosina*, a term used to refer to Catalan, alluding to the

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<sup>149</sup> I use the concepts of *decadència* and *renaixença* as simplified signposts of sorts, to refer to two constructs in the Catalan literary criticism. However, both the inexistence of literature in Catalan before Aribau and the reduction of the cultural production to literature written in the normative Catalan have been questioned. Dominic Keown points to ‘the contribution of the popular classes who lived, worked and entertained themselves within the maternal idiom’ before the nineteenth century, which should not be understated. The popular contributions to Catalan culture such as castells or human towers, the revival of the *sardana*, popular ballads and comical theatrical pieces exemplified by the *sainet*, all of which occurred in the period considered as decadent, may not have come from the bourgeoisie class to which Aribau belonged, yet they became fundamental elements of Catalan culture. See: *A Companion to Catalan Culture*, ed. by Dominic Keown (Woodbridge: Tamesis), pp. 15-18. Likewise, Albert Rossich offers various examples of literary production during the so-called *decadència* period and observes that reducing Catalan culture to the cultural production in Catalan is not critically rigorous. See: Albert Rossich, ‘És vàlid avui el concepte de decadència de la cultura catalana a l’època moderna? Es pot identificar decadència amb castellanització,’ in *Manuscripts: revista d’història moderna* (1997, Vol. 15), pp. 127-134.

<<https://raco.cat/index.php/Manuscripts/article/view/23308>> [accessed: 23 December 2020]

<sup>150</sup> Bonaventura Carles Aribau, *Oda a la pàtria* (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1983), p. 5.

links and similarities, as well as the shared state of minorization, between Catalan and Occitan (the name *llemosí* originates from *Limousin*, or in Occitan: *Lemosin*, a former administrative region of France). Lemosin, and through it Catalan, are naturalized, located in the pre-verbal cries of a newborn baby; however, Lemosin does not act as a one-to-one equivalent of Catalan constructed as a homogenous language tied to a single territory. As Brad Epps asserts, via August Rafanell:

Composed in Madrid, Aribau's poem makes nostalgic reference not to Catalan but to Limousin, which constituted, according to August Rafanell, 'a stable, uniform, and elegant foil to a deteriorated Catalan-Valencian-Balearic bereft of a national dimension, a dimension already occupied by Spanish' [...]. Limousin, in other words, served to counter 'the progressive breakdown of the cohesion of the Catalan territories and the accompanying conscience of difference (especially among Valencians and Balearics)',<sup>151</sup>

By using the metonymy of Limousin the preserves the territorial, linguistic and cultural diversity that Catalan represent, including its variants from Valencia, the Balearic islands, Andorra, Perpignan, etc. Diversity, in this sense, does not contradict unity. For Epps, 'The tendency to look beyond the peninsula, and hence beyond the Spanish state, and in so doing to forge a more unified understanding of the Catalan language characterizes an array of cultural endeavors in Catalonia.'<sup>152</sup>

'Lemosin' is also present in the intimate relationship of the lyrical 'I' with God, as the language of prayer. Not only does the knowledge of Catalan in the poet's vision evoke the dimension of the pre-symbolic or the pre-linguistic, but it also resembles a bodily function; it is incorporated into the naturalized order of reproduction, as if the mother had transmitted linguistic and cultural codes in her milk. The mother is imagined as a silent guardian of culture, who transmits, through her body, a message that transcends her understanding, knowledge or perception. Because of its location in the realm of the bodily, the natural, the relationship of the lyrical 'I' with his language is represented as unbreakable and fundamental to his identity. Such representation of the language constituted a metaphorical argument in the quest to justify the need to preserve and cherish the Catalan language during the *Renaixença* period. These metaphorizations are, of course, not specific to Catalan thinkers. In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler explores in detail the history of symbolically rendering womanhood as shapeless

<sup>151</sup> Brad Epps, 'Modernisme in Catalonia,' in *Modernism*, ed. Astradur Eysteinnsson, Vivian Liska (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), pp. 781–800.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

materiality. According to Butler,

‘[A]s nurse, mother, womb, the feminine is symbolically collapsed into a set of figural functions. In this sense, Plato’s discourse on materiality [...] is one that does not permit the notion of the female body as a human form.’<sup>153</sup>

Butler points to the etymological associations of motherhood and, by extension, femininity, with the material:

The classical association of femininity with materiality can be traced to a set of etymologies which link matter with mater and matrix (or the womb) and, hence with the problematic of reproduction.<sup>154</sup>

While Marçal was well aware the complexity of the Catalan literary legacy both before and after the *Renaixença* (as we find from her biography, she started reading Jacint Verdaguer,<sup>155</sup> the leading figure of the movement, as early as in secondary school,) she also questioned the myth of the natural, pre-linguistic bond between the mother and the baby.

One of Marçal’s untitled poems from *La germana, l’estrangera* begins with her daughter’s name, which functions as both a proper name and a noun, a device that Marçal borrowed from Ausiàs March and used frequently.<sup>156</sup> The poem reads: ‘Heura | victòria marçal | germana | estrangera, de cop feta present: | Com desxifrar el teu llenguatge bàrbar | i violent que força els meus confins,’<sup>157</sup> (‘Heura’ | ‘the victory of March’ | ‘the sister/ the foreigner suddenly present: | How to decipher your violent, barbarian language | which forces my boundaries open.’) *Heura* in Catalan also means ‘ivy,’ ‘of March’ could symbolize spring, a new beginning, the birth of a baby and the ‘rebirth’ of plants after winter; it is also the poet’s and her daughter’s surname: Marçal. The barbarian, opaque code used by the baby that her mother cannot understand becomes almost inhuman (if we define humanity by the ability to use symbolic language, which, as I argue further into this work, Fiedorczuk openly opposes to and Marçal implicitly questions.) It is described as “violent” in that it forcefully shifts the boundaries of the self: the identity of the educated, literate adult, brought up to perceive the world through accounts of (mostly male)

<sup>153</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2011, ProQuest Ebook Central), p. 25. <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cam/detail.action?docID=683946>> [accessed 10 August 2020]

<sup>154</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 7.

<sup>155</sup> Julià, p. 53.

<sup>156</sup> The names of Mai and Fina, the poet’s daughter and life partner, are inserted into the poems as adverbs and adjectives in Marçal’s collections of poems *Terra de mai* and *Desglaç*.

<sup>157</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 284.

poets. The exoticized figure of the mother, who “naturally” can always communicate with her child is thus destabilized, only to be substituted by the poet, who is also a mother. The poet-mother needs to question the rationality of language – in trying to understand a newborn, she needs to sacrifice her own boundaries, leaving the confines of the linguistic.

In *La germana, l'estrangera*, the lyrical ‘I’ is also reliving the experience of giving birth, in which the physical boundaries of the body are forced open in order to release the baby that later becomes a separate subject. In another poem from *La germana, l'estrangera*, Marçal writes that giving birth feels ‘com si un tauró m’arrenqués una mà,’<sup>158</sup> (‘as if a shark was tearing a hand of mine apart,’) thus de-romanticizing the experience, but also problematizing the boundaries that separate the mother and the child.<sup>159</sup> The process of becoming a mother becomes, thus, much more painful and arduous than the vision offered by Aribau. After all, as Marçal claims, ‘qualsevol canvi important implica dolor’ (‘any important change implies pain.’)<sup>160</sup>

The references to limits (and the breaking thereof) are recurrent in *La germana, l'estrangera*, also in the context of delimiting languages and cultures. As typical in Marçal’s poetry, the book also contains a number of Classical tropes, for instance in poems such as ‘Hydra’ or ‘D’Artemis a Diana.’ The latter is especially interesting as it is an imaginary letter or an apostrophe by the Ancient Greek goddess to her Roman incarnation —or, shall we say, her inherited self, her translation. In the poem, Artemis asks Diana for

uns altres ulls que [...] aprenguin a llegir l’alfabet viu | indesxifrat, hermètic, del mirall.  
[...] Noves mans, llengua nova, nous sentits. | Uns nous camins excavats sang a sang. |  
Als nous camins demano una altra sang | que els recorri exaltada, nua, nova. | Que en  
violenti els límits i els avencs,<sup>161</sup>

[Other eyes that could [...] learn to read the lively | hermetic alphabet of the mirror, not yet deciphered. [...] New hands, new tongue, new senses. | New roads excavated blood by blood. | I ask the new roads for another blood | that would run the roads in exaltation, naked, new, | busting down the boundaries and chasms.']

The translation and transformation of the Greek goddess into her Roman form are depicted as giving birth, as a painful, creative process. The baby’s language is referred to as ‘barbarian’ – the term which in Ancient Greece was applied to denominate those who did not speak Greek or

<sup>158</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 282.

<sup>159</sup> The question of drawing boundaries in intimate relationships will be a frequent motif in Marçal’s poetry and prose, which I address in more detail in the last chapter of this work.

<sup>160</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2020), p. 245.

<sup>161</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 356.

follow Greek customs, who would blabber in a way that was not understandable, that was other. In Marçal's notes on the process of creating *La germana, l'estrangera*, the poet questions the contrast between the 'dark', 'barbarian' and the 'clear' or 'pure' ideals. The poem plays with the names Bàrbara and Clara, seen as two sides of the same coin, as we see in one of the initial drafts or notes on the poem preserved in Marçal's archive:

Poemes d'Artemis a Diana  
 Bàrbara/Clara  
 Fada i Bruixa  
 Clara, Bàrbara –  
 ment dolça  
 Per tot això t'anomenaré Clara  
 Per això et dic germana  
 Germana dolça de l'incest més dolç  
 per tot això t'anomenaré bàrbara.  
 Estrangera.

[Poems from Artemis to Diana | Bàrbara/Clara (or Barbarous/Clear) | Fairy and Witch | Clear, Barbarous - | Iy sweet | For all those reasons I will name you Clara | For all those reasons I call you sister | Sweet sister of the sweetest incest | for all those reasons I will call you barbarous. | Foreigner.]

Artemis, in the poem, is a 'daughter' of Diana and yet her incarnation, an incestuous repetition (perhaps daughter and lover, lover and sister at the same time), and a translation. Foreign and sweet, barbarian, strange and homely, the mother and daughter are different and the same, they both speak their own languages and embrace this momentary non-communication. In Marçal's version of inheritance, women, rather than 'vessels' to reproduce language and culture are agents, whose voices express the conflictive dimension of cultural legacy.

### **East from the West and West from the East: Martyrs, Esperantists, and Sarmatians**

Similarly to Marçal, Fiedorczuk speaks against the exclusion of women writers from the literary canon in Polish. She points to the Polish testimonies of oppression and heroism, which rely on the metaphysical, messianic male figures, for example in the poetry of Adam Mickiewicz:

There can be no doubt that modern Polish poetry begins with Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855). Mickiewicz is the Polish poet, *par excellence*. He is the author of a tale in verse considered the Polish national epic entitled *Pan Tadeusz*; the romantic drama *Dziady*, based on the ancient Slavic and Lithuanian feast commemorating the dead; as well as shorter lyrics, ballads, and sonnets that revolutionized Polish poetic diction. [...] Mickiewicz is the main perpetrator of the most deadly element of Polish political



mythology, namely, the lunatic idea that Poland is 'the Christ of nations,' crucified by its enemies but destined to rise and become the Savior of Europe.<sup>162</sup>

Fiedorczuk makes a reference to the present-day, political appropriations of the Polish Romantic legacy, resulting in transformations and appropriations in which 'contemporary right-wingers propagate an obsolete, death-obsessed, and strictly masculine form of patriotism.'<sup>163</sup> 'A symbolic transformation of Poland might therefore begin with a rereading of our romantic legacy'<sup>164</sup> – Fiedorczuk concludes. As I will argue in this section, to reduce Mickiewicz's opinions on religion to Christian messianism would seem overly simplifying. In her literature, however, Fiedorczuk recuperates those elements of the Polish tradition that are also already present in the Romantic period, and that render Poland as a multilingual, multiethnic and multireligious region.

Shaken by multiple wars, partitions, invasions and most recently, occupation by the Nazis and the Soviets, Poland, its language and culture, has struggled to retrieve its self-determination and a sense of symbolic unity. According to Norman Davies,

in the history of the Polish nation, the destiny of its members has been fused for long periods and in the most intimate way with that of other peoples – in the early centuries with the Czechs and other Slavs; from 1385 to 1793 with the peoples of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania; from 1772 to 1918, with the peoples of the Russian, German, and Austrian Empires; and over the entire span of recorded history to the Final Solution of 1941-4 with the Ashkenazy Jews. In strong contrast to conditions which prevailed for centuries prior to the Second World War, the present situation, where the limits of the Polish People's Republic are virtually coterminous with the homeland of a homogenous and nationally-conscious Polish nation, is unprecedented. It represents a radical break with the past.<sup>165</sup>

Those words, written during the Soviet rule in Poland, acquire an even more striking resonance after 1989, when Poland may again be regarded as an autonomous nation-state. In spite of the turbulent past, very few Polish historians, according to Davies,

have doubted the contention that the Polish community of their own day was the sole legitimate claimant to the soil on which they live, and that they are the natural and exclusive heirs of all those earlier communities who occupied the same land.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'Strangers in the Country of the Poet,' *World Literature Today* (Jan-Feb 2017), p. 46. (The original article is written in English.)

<sup>163</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'Strangers in the Country of the Poet,' p. 47.

<sup>164</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'Strangers in the Country of the Poet,' p. 47.

<sup>165</sup> Norman Davies, *God's Playground: a History of Poland in Two Volumes*, Vol. 1 'The origins to 1795' (Oxford: Clarendon Press Oxford, 1982), p. 11.

<sup>166</sup> Davies, p. 10.

In her book *Niesamowita słowiańszczyzna*, Maria Janion draws similar conclusions. Janion focuses on four moments in the historical discourse of the Polish nation: the ‘baptism’ of Poland as the origin of an imposed, Christian homogeneity, the narratives of multicultural greatness of the Baroque literature written in the times of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the post-partition martyr and hero narratives of Romanticism, and the trauma of Holocaust.

Janion considers the initial forceful conversion of the Slavic tribes as a repressed trauma that will reappear in Polish Romantic fantasies of a pan-Slavic mythology. According to the critic, when in 966 the duke of Polanians, Mieszko I, took a symbolic ‘baptism’ in 966, the process of converting the local tribes to Roman Catholicism triggered the destruction of Slavonic myths, religions and languages. As a result, an already ‘Christian’ Poland established its statehood with the approval of the pope and the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>167</sup> But, as Janion suspects, not even the newly ‘baptized’ Poland was religiously homogenous: there is evidence that both the Eastern and the Roman Catholic rites coexisted after the baptism (together with the remaining Slavic beliefs).<sup>168</sup> As Davies suggests,

‘[t]he character and connections of the early Christian church in Poland were far from simple [...]. [S]ince the Polanians took their Christianity from Bohemia, it must be remembered that until the end of the eleventh century, the Slavonic liturgy of the Cirillo-Methodian tradition co-existed in the Czech lands alongside the German-sponsored Latin Church’.

Janion seems to support Davies’ hypothesis, pointing to some elements of ‘Bogurodzica’ (‘Mother of God’), one of the most well-known, anonymous, medieval songs in Polish, in which she observes several theological elements that may potentially have come from the Eastern tradition.<sup>169</sup> Although there is no direct evidence of the influence of the Cirillo-Methodian tradition on the territory inhabited by the Polanians, the trace of coexistence and mixing may be found in the Polish language, as ‘much of the religious vocabulary was adopted from Czech and

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<sup>167</sup> There is no agreement between historians as to whether the decision of the then duke Mieszko to convert was directly influenced by political interests such as the menace from other tribes which could be averted by marrying the Christian, Bohemian princess Dobrawa and pursuing the Polish-Czech alliance rather than a Polish-German one. Many historians, however, focus on the consequences of this decision for the local communities rather than on its origins. For example, Włodzimierz Szafrński provides concise evidence that Christianity was imposed on the local tribes by force, torture and persecution in his book *Prahistoria religii na ziemiach polskich* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich - Wydaw. Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1987). In *Barbarzyńska Europa* (Warszawa: “Iskry,” 2004) Karol Modzelewski argues that the Christianization of the Slavonic tribes was hasty and based on the destruction of buildings, artefacts and cultural practices rather than explaining the principles of the new faith.

<sup>168</sup> Janion, pp. 180-185.

<sup>169</sup> See: ‘Bogurodzica’ in: Janion, pp. 180-185.

Slavonic forms, not from German or Latin ones. Words such as *chrzest* [baptism], *kazanie* [sermon], *kościół* [church], *pacierz* [Paternoster], and *ksiądz* [priest] provide clear examples.<sup>170</sup> As there are hardly any traces of the pre-Christian beliefs, rites, and social organization of Polonians, Janion suggests another possibility: perhaps the Christianization of Poland begun before the symbolic ‘baptism’, only it was carried out according to the Cirillo-Methodian tradition.<sup>171</sup>

For Janion, the shadow of the lost cultural and religious diversity of which there are hardly any written traces manifested itself in the need to create the fictional narratives of Slavonic brotherhood. Literary production in Polish reaches its full bloom around the sixteenth century, when Poland belongs to the bi-confederation of Poland and Lithuania, home not only to Polish and Lithuanian speakers, but also to the speakers of Ruthenian (the dialects of which later evolved into modern Belarusian and Ukrainian), Arabic, Yiddish, Hebrew, Latin, French, along with many others. The bi-confederation also prides itself on its religious tolerance and cultural diversity. In the seventeenth century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth just became the second largest country of Europe which, according to critic Czesław Hernas, contributed to the propagation of narratives of national greatness in the Polish Baroque literature.<sup>172</sup> One of such narratives was that of the Sarmatian tradition. What was later denominated Sarmatism was a syncretic fantasy that depicted the nobles —and only nobles— as a separate, prestigious lineage, dating back to the ancient Iranian confederation of Sarmatia.<sup>173</sup> The Sarmatian culture, although seemingly multilingual and cross-ethnic (as Janion observes, the choice of a nomadic, Iranian tribe as the origin of the constructed, Sarmatian “community” in a way shifted the understanding of what is “cultured” and “barbarian”)<sup>174</sup> nevertheless ended up being instrumentalized to serve the political and economic interests of a narrow group. At the same time, some of the Baroque writers infused this cult of mythologized, cross-religious origins with Catholic narratives: according to Andrzej Maksymilian Fredro (1620-1679), the political organization of the Commonwealth had been established by God, while Wespazjan Kochowski (1633-1700) claimed that the Sarmatians were a nation chosen by God.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Davies, p. 69.

<sup>171</sup> Janion, p. 180.

<sup>172</sup> Czesław Hernas, *Barok* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2008), p. 9.

<sup>173</sup> Hernas, p. 12.

<sup>174</sup> Janion, p. 176.

<sup>175</sup> Hernas, p. 13.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, after numerous wars, the urban structure of the Commonwealth was severely damaged and the political and economic instability increased. The system of *Rzeczpospolita szlachecka* ('The nobles' republic') had deprived the king of most of his power, with the oligarchic magnates leading a lifestyle of excess, seeking to become the sole rulers of their vast areas of land and implementing their own internal and foreign politics, as critic Mieczysław Klimowicz explains.<sup>176</sup> The nobility also became symbolically tied to the interests of the Catholic Church, depicted as part of the national identity discourse. The Catholic community narratives of the nobles were aiming towards homogenization and supremacy of a single religion, the interests of a single, although internally divided, social class. To quote Klimowicz again,

hasła 'Polska przedmurzem chrześcijaństwa' oraz 'szlachcic defensor fidei,' nabrały znaczenia w okresie panowania katolicyzmu, wojen prowadzonych przez Polskę z krajami takimi jak Turcja, Szwecja czy Rosja, w których panowały religie niekatolickie'<sup>177</sup>

[slogans such as 'Poland as the bulwark of Christianity' or 'nobleman: *defensor fidei*' gained importance in the period in which Catholicism became powerful, with the wars between Poland and Turkey, Sweden or Russia, all controlled by non-Catholic religions.']

In 1772, the first partition was agreed between Prussia, Russia and the Habsburg Empire, soon followed by another two. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Poland vanished from the map, but, as a discursive entity, it was still, perhaps more than ever, reproduced symbolically. New narratives of stateless nation and linguistic homeland were to be created by the Romantics, this time not based on national greatness, but on national victimization.

According to Janion, the psychological effects of the partitions of Poland that occurred after the period of imagined national greatness, left a lasting mark on the ways in which Poland is imagined by the Poles. Janion points to the crucial importance of becoming a stateless nation and speaks of 'neurotic cries' of the Polish Romantic poets of the time, aimed to elicit acceptance and solidarity from Europe:

Polska została usunięta przez trzech zaborców: Rosję, Prusy i Austrię, z mapy Europy pod koniec XVIII wieku. Miało to oczywiście decydujące konsekwencje dla naszej

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<sup>176</sup> Mieczysław Klimowicz, *Oświecenie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2011), p. 11.

<sup>177</sup> Klimowicz, p. 45.

świadości. Odegrało też wielką rolę w ciągle ponawianym poszukiwaniu swego miejsca w Europie jako *n a r ó d b e z p a ń s t w a*. Stosunek Polaków do Europy w tym czasie można określić jako bardzo drażliwy, wręcz neurotyczny. Romantynom zwłaszcza przypadła rola bezustannego przypominania o Polsce, wychwalania jej zasług dla Europy, szukania europejskich sojuszników [...]. Na tej podstawie powstały rozmaite odmiany mesjanizmu, wśród nich – Mickiewiczowska idea mesjanizmu słowiańsko-francuskiego [...]. Wedle koncepcji Krasińskiego, ‘Kościół ludzki powszechny’ składa się z narodów, będących całościami duchowymi i przenikniętych duchem Bożym.<sup>178</sup>

[Poland was erased —by three occupants: Russia, Prussia and Austria— from the map of Europe by the end of 18th century. Evidently, it had decisive consequences for our consciousness. It also played a pivotal role in the incessant search for our place in Europe as a *s t a t e l e s s n a t i o n*. The attitude of the Poles towards Europe in that time may be described as hypersensitive, or even neurotic. The Romantics, more than anyone else, took on the role of constantly reminding everyone of Poland, praising its merits for Europe, searching for European allies (...). This is how different kinds of messianic thought arose, such as Mickiewicz’s Franco-Slavonic messianism. According to Krasiński’s idea, ‘the communal, human Church’ consists of the nations, which are spiritual wholes imbued with the spirit of God.]

The strategy of the Romantic consisted, thus, in looking for cultural and religious links between Poland and the rest of Europe. Out of the conflicting versions of Polishness, Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), Zygmunt Krasiński (1812-1859) and Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1834), the three key figures of Polish Romanticism (together, perhaps, with Cyprian Kamil Norwid) were underlining the ‘universal,’ ‘Western’ heritage of Poland to elicit solidarity from other European states. Multiple narratives were created of the spiritualized, sacred nation whose Christian core values would justify the right of Poland to exist in the European community or communality.

For instance, Mickiewicz searched for the symbolic and imaginative definition of Poland within a (re)constructed, Slavic unity that originated from the word of God. In his lectures in Paris (a four-year cycle of lectures on Slavonic literature in the Collège de France, 1798-1855), Mickiewicz fabricates —or speculates about— the origins of the word *Słowianie* (‘Slavs’), positing a common etymology with ‘Słowo’ (‘the Word’, here understood as ‘the Word of God’). Mickiewicz’s version of Slavonic community becomes part of the Romantic debate on origins. Unlike Mickiewicz, Paweł Woronicz (1757-1829) claimed that the word is ‘Sławianie’ instead of ‘Słowianie’, from the Polish *śława*, meaning ‘fame’ and pointing to heroism as an inherently Slavic value.<sup>179</sup> There is yet another etymology, present in the bucolic and exoticizing narratives

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<sup>178</sup> Janion, pp. 185-186.

<sup>179</sup> Janion, pp. 23-24.

of the Slavic peoples, advanced by Johann Gottfried Herder, who points to the word ‘slave’ as a potential origin for ‘Slav’, *Słowianin*. For Herder, the Slavonic tribes ‘sadzili drzewa owocowe, wiodąc na swój sposób życie radosne, wypełnione muzyką,’<sup>180</sup> (‘planted fruit trees while living their happy lives full of music,’) an image unsettlingly reminiscent of Rousseau’s ‘good savage.’ The narrative of Slavs as “natural born slaves” later also constituted an important part of Hitler’s propaganda.<sup>181</sup>

On the other hand, as Janion observes, in the 1818 treatise *O Sławiańszczyźnie przed chrześcijaństwem* (‘On Slavness Before Christianity’), Zorian Dołęga Chodakowski (1784-1825),<sup>182</sup> searches for pre-Christian ‘origins’ of the Slavic community. In analyzing the treatise, Janion pays special attention to what she refers to as important signs of Romantic otherness, as Zorian identified as Slavic, anti-Latinist, northern and sympathetic to polytheism.<sup>183</sup> He argued that Polish Romantic imagery strives to break its ties with Classicism and Christianity and that it needs to seek new ways of expression that are not founded either on Greek or Latin influences, an idea that could perhaps be read as a counter-claim against the assumed homogeneity of the ‘European’ canon. The Romantic vision of community, for Chodakowski, is a complex construct, very much like Mickiewicz’s understanding of the ‘Slavic’ origins. Indeed, Mickiewicz’s attitude towards the Christian faith was conflicted, very much influenced by images of the original imposition of Christianity on the Slavic peoples (as we can see, to quote the most obvious example, in his 1828 narrative poem ‘Konrad Wallenrod’), even though, nowadays, his work is often reduced to the messianic representation of Poland as the ‘Christ of the nations.’

The violence of multiple invasions, according to Janion, gave rise to the conflicted sense of the Polish community and privileging martyr narratives of the nation. Simultaneously, however, narratives of moral superiority over the exoticized, “impure” “East” were being produced, not only by the Romantics, but also in later literature, for example by the Positivist, best-selling Henryk Sienkiewicz. In Janion’s words:

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<sup>180</sup> Janion, p. 24.

<sup>181</sup> Janion, p. 19.

<sup>182</sup> Zorian Dołęga Chodakowski was the pen name of Adam Czarnocki, Polish ethnographer and archaeologist of Romantic inclinations and pan-Slavic convictions.

<sup>183</sup> Janion, p. 49.

Procesy zaborczego skolonizowania Polski w XIX i XX wieku oraz przeciwstawne im Sienkiewiczowskie marzenia o kolonizowaniu innych wytworzyły nieraz paradoksalną polską m e n t a l n o ś ć p o s t c o l o n i a l n ą. Przejawia się ona w poczuciu bezsilności i klęski, niższości i peryferyjności kraju oraz jego opowieści. Temu [...] odczuciu niższości wobec “Zachodu” przeciwstawia się w obrębie tego samego paradygmatu mesjanistyczna duma w postaci narracji o naszych wyjątkowych cierpieniach i zasługach.<sup>184</sup>

[The processes of the invasive colonization of Poland in the 19th and 20th century as well as the contrasting fantasies of colonizing others in [the writing of] Sienkiewicz have created an often paradoxical p o s t c o l o n i a l m e n t a l i t y. It manifests itself in a sense of helplessness and defeat, inferiority and peripherality of the country and of its narratives. Within the same paradigm, this sense of inferiority towards the “West” [...] is contrasted with the messianic pride in the narratives of our exceptional suffering and merits.]

Sienkiewicz (1846-1916), one of the most widely read and translated writers in Polish and a Nobel Prize winner, is known for perpetuating the motif of Polish spiritual superiority and heroism. When Poland was under partitions, the Positivist author created numerous historical novels which followed the same pattern – the adventures of the brave, Polish warriors in their battle against the ‘savage’ and ‘immoral’ oppressors: the Cossacks (*Ogniem i mieczem*, ‘With Fire and Sword’, 1884), the Turks (*Pan Wołodyjowski*, ‘Colonel Wołodyjowski’, 1888) the Swedish (*Potop*, ‘The Deluge’, 1886), the Teutonic Knights (*Krzyżacy*, ‘The Knights of the Cross’, 1900). The brave and honorable men of his novels would often fall in love with beautiful, delicate and helpless women, who played the role of trophies in the quarrels with other (often ‘savage’ or ‘oriental’) men, or were kidnapped and had to be saved (implicitly from the threat of losing the only version of ‘purity’ or ‘virtue’ accessible to them – virginity), thus playing the role of internal victims. In *Quo vadis* (1896), Sienkiewicz also praised the spiritual integrity of the Christians, persecuted in Ancient Rome; hinting towards the feelings of oppression in Poland. This time, Sienkiewicz was creating a sense of community not around a common, exoticized enemy or a shared ‘code of honor’ proper to the ‘civilized’ nobility and absent in the orientalized ‘barbarians,’ but around a ‘common,’ ‘single’ Catholic faith, represented as exceptionally mistreated throughout history. It is perhaps one of the reasons why the research regarding the participation of Polish families in the Shoah is still struggling to make it into the historical mainstream.<sup>185</sup> As Andrzej Leder observed, via Janion, national victimhood constitutes an

<sup>184</sup> Janion, p. 12.

<sup>185</sup> Katarzyna Chmielewska, ‘The intelligentsia and the Holocaust. Dispersing the image’, *SLH*, 7/2018, p. 1.

important national trope:

Dość powszechnie przyjmuje się, że podstawowe dla Polski uniwersum symboliczne ukształtowało się w XIX wieku. Historia zrywów i klęsk, zapisana w wielkich dramatach romantycznych, określa takie pole, w którym „najokrutniejsza krytyka Polski nie może przekroczyć tego niewidzialnego łańcucha, który łączy nas z naszymi niewinnymi ofiarami” [...], jak pisze Maria Janion, znawczyni tegoż pola. [...] Otóż każdy Polak odczytujący tę frazę będzie myślał przede wszystkim o polskich ofiarach, które zginęły z ręki różnych obcych prześladowców. Ale przecież słowa „nasze niewinne ofiary” mogą również znaczyć – a powiedziałbym nawet, że raczej znaczą – ofiary, którym to my zadaliśmy śmierć, choć nic nam one nie zawiniły. To z nimi łączy nas „niewidzialny łańcuch”; wyparta pamięć czynów i zaniechań, które uczyniły nas tym, kim jesteśmy, ale kosztem ich istnienia.<sup>186</sup>

[According to a fairly common assumption, the basic symbolic *universum* of Poland was shaped in the nineteenth century. The history of uprisings and failures, written in the great Romantic theatre, defines a [symbolic] realm in which ‘even the most cruel critique of Poland cannot overcome the invisible chain that links us with our innocent victims,’ [...] as Maria Janion, the connoisseur of this very realm, writes. [...] Well, each Pole who reads this phrase will think most of all about the Polish victims who were killed by different, foreign oppressors. But really the words ‘our innocent victims’ may also mean – and probably do mean – the victims that we killed, even though they did nothing to deserve it. It is with them that we are linked by this ‘invisible chain’ of repressed memory of our deeds and of our inaction, which made us who we are at the price of their existence.]

Indeed, Leder’s words are supported by a very recent court case in which Jan Grabowski and Barbara Engelking, authors of the book *Dalej jest noc* (‘The night continues’),<sup>187</sup> documenting the Polish participation in the genocide of the Jews, were found guilty of defamation, illustrates this difficulty.<sup>188</sup>

Along with multiple hero stories of Poles who helped their Jewish neighbors, Anti-Semitic narratives were also present for many years, as Katarzyna Chmielewska claims, not only in rural areas, as is commonly assumed but also among the intelligentsia.<sup>189</sup> In the interwar period, during the war and occupation of Poland, slandering, blackmailing, denouncing, assaulting and

<sup>186</sup> Andrzej Leder, *Prześlona rewolucja. Ćwiczenia z logiki historycznej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki politycznej, 2014), Kindle Locations 160-170.

<sup>187</sup> Barbara Engelking, Jan Grabowski (eds.), *Dalej jest noc: Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski* (Warszawa: Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2018).

<sup>188</sup> For a thorough and balanced analysis of the contents of the book and its controversies, see: Stanley Bill, ‘Poles and the Holocaust: new research, old controversies,’ *Notes from Poland* (June 2018) <<https://notesfrompoland.com/2018/06/29/peles-and-the-holocaust-new-research-old-controversies>> [accessed 30 March 2021]

<sup>189</sup> Chmielewska, p. 2.



robbing the people of Jewish origin, regardless of their cultural, religious or linguistic self-determination, was a common practice among members of all social classes in Poland.<sup>190</sup>

In her essay ‘Strangers in the Country of the Poet,’ Fiedorczuk writes about one of the distinguished women poets who was slandered and murdered because of her Jewish origin: Zuzanna Ginczanka (1917-1944).<sup>191</sup> Known for her animated, poetic embrace of the body and of its power to sense and perceive, Ginczanka, according to Fiedorczuk, managed to inscribe ‘the author’s singular existence into the vibrant rhythms of the cosmos, as if to challenge the brutal forces of history that cut her life short.’<sup>192</sup> Ginczanka, or Sana Gincburg, was born in Kiev in 1917. In her home only Russian was spoken, but Sana, or Sanoczka, as her family referred to her, chose Polish as her language from a very early age.<sup>193</sup> Captivated by the sound of the Polish language, the young poet wrote in 1934, in Polish: ‘kiełkujący kłęczami wyraz | wtargnął we mnie, wrósł jak ojczyzna | mowa moja jest dla mnie krajem,’<sup>194</sup> (‘the word, sprouting with rhizomes | invaded me, it grows in me like fatherland | my speech is my country,’) thus describing the Polish language as her country and fatherland – *ojczyzna*. Ginczanka moved to the capital, soon gained significant acclaim and started frequenting bohemian cafes, such as cafe Zodiak, the main meeting point of the Warsaw cultural elite. She was one of the favorites of the experimental prose writer Witold Gombrowicz (1904-1969) and sat at his table in Zodiak. Neither Gombrowicz nor his friends, however, ever forgot that she was a woman and of Jewish origin. She was referred to as ‘Shulamite,’<sup>195</sup> which pointed to her exoticized otherness among the Polish intelligentsia. With World War II fast approaching, nicknames such as Rachela — coined by the writer and satire author Jerzy Wittlin (1925-1989)— or the ‘Star of Sion,’ by Jerzy Andrzejewski (1909-1983, famous for his support of the Jewish community, author of the novel *Wielki tydzień* – ‘Holy Week,’ which exposed and critiqued interwar Polish antisemitism),<sup>196</sup> although meant to express admiration, also accentuated Ginczanka’s otherness. In her last poem, written in a letter from prison shortly before her murder by the Gestapo (and after being reported

<sup>190</sup> For more data on the topic, see for instance: Jan Grabowski, *Ja tego Żyda znam! Szantażowanie Żydów w Warszawie 1939–1943* (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, IFiS PAN, 2004).

<sup>191</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, ‘Strangers in the Country of the Poet’, in *World Literature Today*, Jan-Feb (2017).

<sup>192</sup> Fiedorczuk, ‘Strangers in the Country of the Poet’, p. 46.

<sup>193</sup> Kiec, ‘Ten los, bez wierszy... O Zuzannie Ginczance i jej poezji’, in *Zuzanna Ginczanka, Wiersze zebrane* (Warszawa/ Sejny: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Wyszyńskiego/ Fundacja Pogranicze, 2014), p. 12.

<sup>194</sup> Kiec, p. 12.

<sup>195</sup> Kiec, p. 28.

<sup>196</sup> Kiec, p. 28.

to them by one of her neighbors), Ginczanka expresses the bitter intuition of her rejection by the Polish canon. In ‘Non omnis moriar’ she alludes to Horace’s ‘Exegi monumentum,’ but most of all to a famous poem by the Romantic Juliusz Słowacki titled ‘Testament mój’ (‘A testament of mine’, Słowacki’s nostalgic, literary ‘last will’ written in 1839 in Paris, where he emigrated), to suggest that, unlike Słowacki’s lyrical ‘I,’ she does think any of her legacy will be appreciated after her death, except for her material things, her imagined Jewish ‘wealth.’<sup>197</sup>

Fiedorczuk engages the topic of both anti-Semitism and the importance of the Jewish Poles for the Polish and international cultural legacy in her novel *Pod słońcem*. One of the key motifs to discuss cultural diversity and community-making in the novel is Esperanto, a constructed language designed by Ludwik Zamenhof (1859-1917), a doctor of Jewish origin born in Białystok, who intended to facilitate or democratize dialogue between the speakers of various “natural” languages. In *Pod słońcem*, Zamenhof is first evoked by a teacher of Russian and French literature, professor Koniarski. One of Koniarski’s beliefs is that language constitutes a person’s home and that, as one can speak many languages, one can have more than one home. Koniarski teaches Esperanto to his young student, Misza, painting a utopian image of Zamenhof as a man who ‘pragnął tylko pokoju. Mówili o nim “Doktor Esperanto”. Doktor, bo był lekarzem, okulistą. A “esperanto” to znaczy “ten, który ma nadzieję”’<sup>198</sup> (‘only wanted peace. They called him “Doctor Esperanto.” Doctor, because he was a medic, an ophthalmologist. And “esperanto” means “one who has hope.”’) Zamenhof ‘nie chciał zniknięcia różnych języków Ziemi, ale tylko tego, żeby możliwe było spotkanie w połowie drogi. Jak uścisk dłoni’<sup>199</sup> (‘did not want different languages to disappear, he only wanted to make it possible to meet halfway. As if shaking hands.’) Białystok, where Zamenhof lived, was at the time part of the Russian Empire. The professor passionately described Zamenhof’s idea of linguistic universality embodied in Esperanto as

coś w rodzaju pomostu, takiej jakby kładki pomiędzy różnymi językami. Mowę nieprzypisaną do żadnego języka, żadnego państwa. Język bez armii. Bez pieniędzy. Dostępny dla wszystkich, łatwy do nauczania, oparty na kilku prostych zasadach. Wierzył, że ludzie zechcą chodzić po tej kładce. [...] Człowiek przejdzie tym mostem,

<sup>197</sup> Translations of Ginczanka’s poem as the original versions are available here:

<<https://www.ginczanka.org/notalofmewilldie>> [accessed 15 March 2018] Słowacki’s poem to which it alludes has been translated by Michał Mikos. See: Juliusz Słowacki, *This Fateful Power*. Sesquicentennial Anthology 1809-1949 (Lublin: Norbertinum, 1999).

<sup>198</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, *Pod słońcem* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie), p. 47.

<sup>199</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Pod słońcem*, p. 48.

spotka drugiego człowieka i zobaczy, że tak naprawdę nie ma różnych gatunków ludzi...<sup>200</sup>

[a kind of bridge, as if it were a platform that links different languages with each other. A speech unassigned to any language, any nation. Without an army. Without money. Available to everyone, easy to learn, based on a few simple rules. He believed that people will want to walk across that bridge. [...] Humans will cross this bridge, meet other humans and see that in reality there are no different kinds of humans.]

The metaphor of the bridge may perhaps be reminiscent of the raft on which Napoleon had signed the 1807 treaty with the tsar Alexander I, as a result of which Białystok became part of the Grodno Governorate of the Russian Empire, and the Napoleonic control over central Europe was confirmed – for bridges, even if designed for peaceful reasons, may also become tools of political control.

Zamenhof himself already lived in times of pogroms; although he managed to survive, the next generation of his family was murdered because of the very differences that he strove to bridge using linguistic communication. In the novel, Koniarski dazzles Misza with stories of Białystok, where ‘rozbrzmiewały różne języki, bo różne narody mieszkwały tam obok siebie, czasem w przyjaźni, czasem we wrogości’<sup>201</sup> (‘different languages could be heard, because different nations lived there next to each other, sometimes as friends, sometimes as foes.’) As Misza becomes proficient in Esperanto, studying in his room in the town of Drohiczyn, ‘w nieodległym lesie wraz z tysiącami innych wsiąkały w ziemię prochy córek doktora: Zofii Zamenhof, lekarki, i Lidii Zamenhof, nauczycielki esperanto’<sup>202</sup> (‘in a forest not so far away, together with many others, the ashes were absorbed into the soil of the doctor’s daughters: Zofia Zamenhof, a doctor, and Lidia Zamenhof, teacher of Esperanto.’) Both of Zamenhof’s daughters were murdered in the Nazi extermination camp of Treblinka, in 1942, victims of Hitler’s interpretation of the ideas of racialized “purity” and “ethnic cleansing.” As Fiedorczuk explains at the end of the book, Lidia Zamenhof was a dedicated advocate of pacifism and Esperanto, who travelled to the United States to teach the language, but was forced to come back to Poland in 1938 because she was refused a visa prolongation. As the novel suggests, one may perhaps have more than one language and more than one home, but the homes are not equally homely to all of their inhabitants, especially if they are migrants.

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Pod słońcem*, p. 48.

<sup>202</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Pod słońcem*, p. 50.

While Fiedorczuk's narration is far from proposing a supranational utopia, she does problematize the topic of universality and particularity in its different, often ambivalent, dimensions. Many characters in Fiedorczuk's *Pod słońcem* are seduced by the idea of trans-national communication and cooperation offered by the Communist ideals in their abstract form. The student Misza, after he grows up, finds the ideals of Soviet Communism just as seductive as the supranational unity of Esperanto, which Misza finally masters and falls in love with (in the novel, Esperanto also symbolizes the unattainable object of desire – it is the language in which Misza communicates with his mistress who lives in Sarajevo).

Misza becomes a Communist in spite of the objections of his father Piotr, who had travelled to the URSS before the arrival of the Soviets to Poland in 1945. When Piotr, Misza's father, was young, a friend of his lured him into abandoning his house in Drohiczyn and into travelling to URSS to build the empire, which he depicted to Piotr as an inclusive, trans-national paradise: 'Bo w Sowietach to jest obojętne, Polak, Rusek, Żyd czy Ukrainiec. Przejdiesz przez granicę i już jesteś swój'<sup>203</sup> ('Because with the Soviets it doesn't matter whether you're a Pole, a Russian, A Jew or a Ukrainian. You cross the border and you're already one of us.') The descriptions that Piotr hears from his friend of the Soviet Empire resembles professor Koniarski's arguments in favor of Esperanto – Soviet Communism promises to overcome the divisions between different 'kinds of humans,' different nations: 'Dopiero kiedy znikną granice pomiędzy krajami, wtedy dopiero skończą się wojny. [...] I już nie będzie Ruska, Polaka, Niemca, Żyda. Będą tylko ludzie'<sup>204</sup> ('Only when the borders between countries disappear, will wars end. [...] There will be no Rusyns, Polish, Germans, Jews. Only people.') So Piotr crosses the borders, takes many trains and arrives at the Ural mountains, to excavate iron for the Soviet tanks. After suffering hunger, solitude, cold and abuse, he tries to come back home on foot and almost dies on the way. Years after coming back, when Poland is under the Soviet rule, Piotr remembers a springtime in Russia, the feeling of unity and collaboration he experienced. He asks himself where he should look for mistakes in the smooth, communist idea of universal communality and cooperation:

Kopali fundament pod budynek nowej fabryki. Zepsuła się koparka, a nie można było czekać, więc ludzie złapali szpadle. Był już spory dół w ziemi, a jego boki [...] tworzyły stopnie. Więc jedni zeszli na samo dno i kopali, wyrzucając ziemię na pierwszy z tych stopni, na którym ustawili się drudzy, aby podawać ziemię znów do góry, a jeszcze wyżej

<sup>203</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Pod słońcem*, p. 78.

<sup>204</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Pod słońcem*, p. 80.

stali już następni, i tak dalej [...]. Szybko to szło i była radość z tej pracy. Setki ludzkich ciał działały jak jedna, sprawna [...] maszyna, a siły tej maszyny były nie do powstrzymania. W czym tkwił błąd?<sup>205</sup>

[They were digging the foundations for a new factory building. The excavator broke down and they could not wait, so the people grabbed their shovels. There was quite a big hole in the ground [...] the walls of which formed steps. So some of them descended to the bottom and dug, they threw the soil onto the first step, on which others were standing to pass the soil up, where there were more people, and so on [...]. The work was going fast and it gave them joy. Hundreds of human bodies worked like a single, operational [...] machine, the power of which was unstoppable. What went wrong?]

As the quote suggests, the Soviet regime, with its set of rigid norms, its censorship and its rule of language, provided clear, unifying conditions for the people to work together. In depicting the three attempts at ‘universality’ that appear in the novel – Esperanto, Communism, and Catholicism, all of which, for all their numerous differences, are founded on an idea of ‘universality,’ Fiedorczuk seems to suggest parallelisms. When Misza meets his future wife, he tells her about Esperanto: ‘Esperanto to język bez państwa, bez armii, do nikogo nie należy, dlatego może należeć do wszystkich’<sup>206</sup> (‘Esperanto is a language without a country, it does not belong to anyone, that is why it can belong to everyone.’) The girl reacts with amusement: ‘Brzmiał trochę jak ksiądz, kiedy to mówił, i trochę chciało mi się śmiać, ale jednocześnie bardzo pragnęłam, żeby miał rację’<sup>207</sup> (‘He sounded a bit like a priest when he was saying it, and I wanted to laugh, but at the same I really wanted for him to be right.’)

Indeed, Soviet Communism is often compared to religion, most notably in Czesław Miłosz’s *Zniewolony umysł* (‘Captive Mind’, 1953). Similarly to religion, it created dogmatic, singular ‘truths’ through linguistic manipulation. In his book *Nowomowa po polsku* (‘Newspeak in Polish,’ 1990), Michał Głowiński studied texts used to serve the Communist regime in Poland. According to Głowiński, one of the most prominent features of newspeak is its ability to ‘narzucanie wyrazistego znaku wartości; znak ten, prowadzący do przejrzystych polaryzacji, nie ma prawa budzić wątpliwości, jego punktem docelowym jest zdecydowana, nie podlegająca zakwestionowaniu ocena,’<sup>208</sup> (‘impose a strong valuation, which leads to clear polarizations, it eliminates doubt, its aim is the absolute judgement that does not lend itself to questioning.’) As a

<sup>205</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Pod słońcem*, p. 105.

<sup>206</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Pod słońcem*, p. 147.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Michał Głowiński, *Nowomowa i ciągi dalsze. Szkice dawne i nowe* (Kraków: Universitas, 2009), p. 12.

result of this procedure, meanings shift: a binary judgement becomes permanently ascribed to an expression that used to be ambiguous or neutral. The reason why univalence impoverishes language is explained by what Głowiński describes as another key feature of newspeak: ‘ma ona ambicje uniwersalne, [...] atakuje pozostałe rejony języka i zmierza do podporządkowania ich sobie,’<sup>209</sup> (‘it has universalizing ambitions, [...] it attacks the remaining areas of the language and aims to submit them under its control.’) Głowiński points to the similarities between the Communist propaganda and the discourse of the currently ruling ‘Law and Justice’ party (‘Prawo i Sprawiedliwość’, henceforth PiS) in Poland.<sup>210</sup> He writes:

Przez 25 lat zajmowałem się nowomową PRL i pisałem, że tam występuje dominacja ocen nad konkretnym znaczeniem. W nowomowie PiS – już przed laty nazwałem ją pisomową – widzę wielką analogię do sposobu mówienia władzy PZPR-owskiej w Polsce Ludowej: wszystko, co robi władza, jest dobre i nie podlega krytyce, jest „dobrą zmianą.”<sup>211</sup>

[For 25 years I have studied the Polish People’s Republic newspeak and I found that one of its features is the domination of judgements over specific information. In PiS’ newspeak, for which years ago I have coined the term of *PiSpeak*, I can see a great parallel with the way the power spoke in People’s Republic. Anything the ruling party does is good and does not admit criticism, they refer to it as *dobra zmiana*.’]

The expression ‘good change’ does not mean anything specific, it only expresses moral judgement. The reference to a ‘good change’ was commonly used by the PiS representatives to refer to their coming into power. Indeed, the instrumental or manipulative use of language sounds more than familiar today, with the president of Poland Andrzej Duda expressing his support for neo-fascist organizations and claiming that ‘LGBT are not people, they are an ideology’ while the police is brutally arresting peaceful LGBT protesters in Warsaw.

Before the situation in Poland became as violent as it is now, Fiedorczuk was already expressing her concerns regarding the language of far-right nationalism. In the essay ‘Jestem z Polski’ (‘I’m from Poland’), published after one of the so called ‘Independence marches,’<sup>212</sup> endorsed and promoted by the president, the poet expressed shame and sadness:

<sup>209</sup> Głowiński, p. 16.

<sup>210</sup> Aleksandra Gumowska, ‘Słownik poprawnej piszczyzny,’ *Newsweek Polska* (January 2019) <<http://www.newsweek.pl/plus/spoleczenstwo/nomomowa-pis-prof-michal-glowinski-o-pisczyzny-wywiad,artykuly,377588,1,z.html>> [accessed 26 March 2017]

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> The ‘independence marches’ are organized by Młodzież Wszechpolska (Pan-Polish Youth), a racist, homophobic and misogynistic organization that claims to take its ideas from the radicalized version of the writings of the interwar politician Roman Dmowski.

Poprzedniego dnia w Warszawie obchodzono 99 rocznicę odzyskania niepodległości, a zatem od szarego rana czytam relacje polskiej i zagranicznej prasy o marszu, który w blasku rac przeszedł z tej okazji przez Warszawę głosząc ksenofobiczne, rasistowskie, nienawistne hasła. Kuląc się ze wstydu próbuję sobie przypomnieć jak to było, jeszcze parę lat temu, odczuwać dumę, kiedy podróżując po świecie mówiłam, że jestem z Polski.<sup>213</sup>

[Yesterday in Warsaw the 99th anniversary of independence was celebrated and so, since the grey morning, I am reading the national and international recounts of the event. The march, illuminated by red flares, walked across Warsaw spreading xenophobic, racist, hateful slogans. I huddle in shame, I am trying to remember what it was like, only a few years ago, to travel around the world and proudly say that I'm from Poland.]

The poet feels humiliated, somehow responsible for her national community, a community that —imagined as it is— exists as a perceived horizon of self-identification. The feelings of national shame and pride, as well as the gesture of looking for approval in other nations, repeat the Romantic cry for solidarity, directed at the imaginary ‘distant cousins’ of Europe. The quote voices the poet’s despair at the fact that the national holiday, a celebration of independence, empowerment and self-determination has now become the site of ‘maskulinistycznym rytuale ognia, barw narodowych i agresywnych okrzyków’<sup>214</sup> (‘masculinist rite of fire, national colors and aggressive calls.’) As Leder claims, the main symbolic problem of today’s Poland, but also of the past versions of the Polish nation, is the fact that the politicians lack metaphors and other signifiers to incorporate resentment into the realm of the republic. For Leder,

ci, których spojrzenie określone jest przez optykę resentymentalnego poczucia krzywdy, nie mogą przyjąć żadnego argumentu, żadnego znaczącego [...]. To zaś powoduje ich wyłączenie z co najmniej trzech ważnych obszarów społecznej wspólnoty, określonych przez najważniejsze wspólne symbole [...]. Po pierwsze, jeśli nie mogą utożsamić innych ze sobą, nie współodczuwają z ich losem. [...] Po drugie, nie ufają w powszechną sprawiedliwość i nie wierzą, że instytucje państwa są po ich stronie. [...] Wreszcie po trzecie, jeśli mają do czynienia z sukcesem, zadowoleniem i pracą nastawioną na pozytywny efekt, która jednak abstrahuje od ich bólu, to reagują nieufnie, jeśli nie wrogo.<sup>215</sup>

[those whose gaze is defined by the optics of resentment and by the feeling of harm cannot accept any argument, any signifier [...]. This, in turn, causes their exclusion from at least three important areas of social community, defined by common symbols [...]. Firstly, if they cannot identify with other people, they do not empathize with the fate of

<sup>213</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, ‘Jestem z Polski,’ *Przekrój* (November 2017) <<https://przekroj.pl/artykuly/felietony/jestem-z-polski-julia-fiedorczuk>> [accessed 10 February 2018]

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Leder, *Kindle Locations* 483-490.

others. [...] Secondly, they do not trust in common justice and do not believe that the state institutions are on their side. [...] And thirdly, if they encounter success, fulfillment and work focused on positive outcomes, which overlooks their pain, they react with distrust, if not hostility.]

Fiedorczuk seems to agree with Leder's 'diagnosis' when she writes that 'Wspólnie [...] możemy decydować o znaczeniu polskości w dwudziestym pierwszym wieku – nie warto zostawiać tej sprawy w rękach tych [...] kierujących się resentymentem i lękiem'<sup>216</sup> ('Together [...] we can decide on the meaning of Polishness in twenty-first century – there is no use leaving it in the hands of those [...] guided by fear and resentment.')<sup>217</sup> Fiedorczuk concludes her essay with a question about the future of Poland:

Polska, o której chce się pamiętać, nie zginęła ani pod zaborami, ani podczas wojny, ani za komunizmu, ale ginie za każdym razem kiedy w środku Warszawy ktoś odwołuje się do faszystowskich haseł czy symboli. Przynajmniej trochę interesująca Polska przetrwała wyjątkowo okrutne zakręty historii - czyżby miała nie przetrwać wolności?<sup>218</sup>

[The Poland that one wants to remember did not die under the partitions, nor during the war, nor during Communism, but it does die every time that, in the middle of Warsaw, someone evokes fascist slogans or symbols. [...] Some interesting bits of Poland survived the exceptionally atrocious turns of history – will they not survive freedom?]

If that is how it ends, the poet observes, then Poland is, in fact, not independent at all. In spite of voicing her concerns and disagreement, Fiedorczuk does not succumb to dystopian hopelessness, neither in speaking about the nation.

Fiedorczuk's alternative vision of patriotism is based on her ecopoetic mindset. In 'Pod lupą kwietnia' ('Through April's Magnifying Glass'), Fiedorczuk proposes versions of patriotism that embrace materiality. Instead of the model of patriotism based on the abstract idea of 'nation' or 'Fatherland,' the Polish poet proposes a patriotic care of the land, of natural environment:

Moi anglistyczni studenci uśmiechają się pod nosem na myśl o nagiej wiosennej ziemi, bo wszystkim w pierwszej chwili przychodzą do głowy psie kupy. Kwitną już w marcu – na miejskich trawnikach, ale też w podwarszawskich lasach, gdzie poza tym rosną hałdy śmieci. [...] A jednak obok wysypisk znajduje się w mazowieckich lasach także ślady po

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<sup>216</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'Jestem z Polski.'

<sup>217</sup> This is not to say that Fiedorczuk overstates the importance of the national symbols in creating the feeling of resentment, she also attends to social and economic factors that create inequalities and result in exclusion. I interrogate on those factors more broadly in Chapter Five, which is dedicated to the figure of the outsider.

<sup>218</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'Jestem z Polski.'



zeszłorocznych piknikach: butelki i puszki po piwie, kartony po sokach, pety i kondomy pozostawione przez ludzi, którzy najwyraźniej właśnie tutaj chcieli spędzić czas – czyli lubią przyrodę...<sup>219</sup>

[My students at the Faculty of English smile discretely at the thought of the naked ground in springtime, because everyone thinks first about dog poo. The poops bloom as early as in March, on city lawns, but also in forests close to Warsaw, where garbage heaps grow. [...] But close to garbage heaps in the forest of Mazovia you can also encounter traces of last year's picnics: beer cans and bottles, juice boxes, cigarette butts, condoms, all left by the people who clearly intended to spend their time there – they must be fond of nature...]

Why is it, the author asks, that the passionately manifested love of the Fatherland in contemporary Poland does not include the actual 'land'? She remembers the American poet Gary Snyder and his vows of fidelity to the symbolic, wild "turtle island." For Snyder, 'Turtle Island' symbolizes North America, seen from the perspective of its diverse forms of life and the way in which humans interact with them. In his poem 'For All', from the book *Turtle Island*, Gary Snyder pronounces a rather unexpected, patriotic pledge: 'I pledge allegiance | I pledge allegiance to the soil | of Turtle Island, | and to the beings who thereon dwell | one ecosystem | in diversity | under the sun. | With joyful interpenetration for all.'<sup>220</sup> 'It's quite radical, Fiedorczuk observes ironically, to make vows to the place in which we live, to the water, the air, squares and parks, streets and forests.' Fiedorczuk sees some hope for a shift in the Polish national narrative – a new patriotism that would also include environmental awareness,<sup>221</sup> but which has yet to establish its own narrative in literature, in the national imagination and communication, on top of the long-lasting sediments of anthropocentric, patriarchal patriotism in Poland.

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<sup>219</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, 'Pod lupą kwietnia,' *Przekrój*, April 2017 <<https://przekroj.pl/artykuly/felietony/pod-lupa-kwietnia-julia-fiedorczuk>> [accessed 20 April 2019]

<sup>220</sup> Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island* (New York: New Directions, 1974) <<https://www.poeticous.com/gary-snyder/for-all-ah-to-be-alive>> [accessed 6 February 2010]

<sup>221</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'Pod lupą kwietnia.'

## Chapter Two: Feminizing the Canon?

‘Oh, I hate the cheap severity of abstract ethics!’<sup>222</sup>  
Oscar Wilde’s ‘Canterville Ghost’

### *Elogi de la paraula? Womanhood, Corporeality, and the Living Word*

One of the key foundational dilemmas in Catalan letters that Marçal engages with is related to the tensions, perhaps even conflict, between *noucentisme* and *modernisme*, often discussed in reference to two literary figures: Joan Maragall and Eugeni d’Ors. In this section, my main concern in exploring (very briefly) the dialogues between Maragall and d’Ors will be their understanding of linguistic purity and its relevance to Marçal’s use of language.

In 1903, Joan Maragall read his *Elogi de la paraula* in the Barcelonian Ateneu, an association founded in Barcelona in 1860 under the name of Ateneu Català to promote cultural and intellectual exchange among Catalan artists and intellectuals. The Ateneu became a prestigious cultural center, organizing conferences and expositions; it also issued literary prizes and hosted literary and artistic groups and famous individuals. In *Elogi de la paraula*, his lecture at the Ateneu, Maragall praised language as the highest symbol of human perfection and distinction vis-a-vis other living beings. Language, as the divine expression of life, should be as alive as possible, which, according to Maragall, makes it imperative for the Catalans to preserve and cherish the popular, “pure” uses of language. “Pure,” for Maragall, becomes the opposite of “unified” or “purified;” diverse uses of language are “pure” insofar as they are they are “spontaneous.” In Maragall’s words,

la paraula és la cosa més meravellosa d’aquest món perquè en ella s’abraçen i s’confonen tota la meravella espiritual de la naturalesa. Sembla que la terra esmerci totes les seves forces en arribar a produir l’home com a més alt sentit de sí mateixa; i que l’home esmerci tota la força del seu ésser en produir la paraula.<sup>223</sup>

[the word is the most marvelous thing in this world because in it all the spiritual marvels of nature merge in an embrace. It seems as if the Earth was mobilizing all its forces to produce the human as the highest manifestation of nature, and as if the human being was mobilizing all the forces of his being to produce the word.]

For the literary language to be alive, as Maragall argued, literature needs the language of feeling

<sup>222</sup> Oscar Wilde, *Complete Short Fiction* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 224.

<sup>223</sup> Joan Maragall, ‘Elogi de la paraula,’ in *Obres completes*, vol. II (Barcelona: Universitat, 1912), p. 3.

(and, implicitly, of Catholic religion); therefore, poetry must draw its inspiration from the popular uses of language. Marçal was fascinated by Maragall's legacy, especially by his poems and translations of Homer, which she studied when preparing her PhD dissertation. Perhaps the most direct alignment between Marçal's and Maragall's vision of poetic language can be observed in Marçal's early poetry that draws from the customs and traditions of Urgell as well as incorporates dialectal vocabulary of the region. Guillem Viladot, Catalan writer from the neighbouring town of Argamunt, to whom Marçal also dedicated an article,<sup>224</sup> wrote about her second book of poetry, *Bruixa de dol*, linking the popular uses of language with the realm of the feminine. For Viladot, Marçal's poetry was characterized by 'la llengua i el llenguatge "amassat al carrer savi, a l'úter sonor del poble," i el ressó de les cançons de pandero "tan populars a la plana d'Urgell"' (the language and speech "amassed at the wise streets, at the resounding uterus of the town," and the eco of the popular songs of the plane of Urgell.)"

In 1911, after Joan Maragall died, Eugeni d'Ors (1881-1954) began to work as secretary of *Institut d'Estudis Catalans*.<sup>226</sup> Although an admirer of Maragall's work, d'Ors strongly opposed it on ideological grounds, using metaphors of putrefaction and impurity: 'La història d'aquesta maduració dels nacionalismes és el fons bellament heroic del llibre d'en Prat de la Riba: el suc de la maduració d'aquella teoria fermenta tumultuosament en els últims versos de Maragall'<sup>227</sup> ('the history of maturing of those nationalisms is the beautifully heroic foundation of Prat de la Riba's book: the ripe juice of this theory ferments tumultuously in the last verses by Maragall,') as D'Ors says in one of his Glossaries, published in the distinguished and pro-Catalan *La Veu de Catalunya*. During the time of his publications in Catalan and before moving to Madrid in 1920, d'Ors dedicated his work to constructing what he deemed a more sensible and pure ideal of the nation, which included the rules of language use, but also of gender roles, which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter of this work. D'Ors vision of poetic language is often contrasted with Maragall's. As Joan Fuster, Catalan literary scholar, puts it,

El Noucents és el contrari del Vuitcents: enfront del "caos", l'"ordre"; enfront de la "natura", la "cultura"; enfront del "rústic", l'"urbà"; enfront de la "mística", la "raó";

<sup>224</sup> Maria-Mercè Marçal, 'A l'arrel del llindar: La poesia de Guillem Viladot,' *Serra d'Or*, Issue 396/December 1992. FMM box no. 14, file no. 3.

<sup>225</sup> Julià, p. 193.

<sup>226</sup> Fuster, p. 149.

<sup>227</sup> Eugeni d'Ors, 'Dos Llibres,' in *Glosari*, 27-VI-1906. <<https://parles.upf.edu/llocs/liteca/book/export/html/463>> [accessed 30 September 2020]

enfront del que era “indefinit”, el “clar i distint”. Etcètera. L’alternança d’inclinacions “clàssiques” i “romàntiques” —més tard, ell mateix, en comptes de “romàntiques” en dirà “barroques”— es perfilava, davant els ulls d’Ors, com una llei històrica constant.<sup>228</sup>

[The nineteen hundreds were the opposite to the eighteen hundreds, with “order” vis-a-vis “chaos”, “culture” vis-a-vis “nature”; “urban” vis-a-vis “rural”, “reason” vis-a-vis “mystique”, the “clear and distinctive” vis-a-vis the “indefinite,” etc. The alternation between the “classical” and the “romantic” inclinations, to which later d’Ors himself will refer to as “baroque” rather than “romantic,” emerged, to the eyes of d’Ors, as a constant historical law.]

In the research notes for her doctoral thesis, which she begun preparing at the University of Barcelona, Marçal addresses the *modernista-noucentista* dualism, underlining that it is necessary to ‘posar entre parèntesi alguns tòpics d’ús corrent com l’antítesi romàntic-classic, que, a casa nostra, en porta adherida una altra: modernisme-noucentisme’<sup>229</sup> (‘put some common places such as the antithesis of “the Romantic/ the Classical” in brackets; this dichotomy, for us, is often followed by that of *modernisme* versus *noucentisme*.’) Although she clearly distinguished between the attitudes traditionally regarded as “classical,” as opposed to the more “romantic” or “spiritual” Modernism, she also argued, via Eduard Valentí, that *noucentisme* should not be perceived as only “classical” and *Modernisme* as only “anticlassical”:

Em limitaré a citar de nou l’opinió de Valentí al respecte,<sup>230</sup> que en bona part comparteixo. Segons ell, el noucentisme orsià ‘fou la més enèrgica apologia del classicisme que mai s’hagi fet a casa nostra i al mateix temps una violenta simplificació [...] del veritable esperit clàssic. [...] no era pas de Plató d’on venia el suposat classicisme de Xènius, per molt que el cités, sinó més aviat d’autors del tarannà de Barrès i Maurras.’<sup>231</sup>

[I will limit myself to quoting, once again, Valentí’s opinion, which I largely support. According to Valentí, the Noucentisme of d’Ors was ‘the most lively apology of Classicism ever made at our home and at the same time a violent simplification [...] of the true classical spirit. [...] D’Ors did not take his presumed Classicism from Plato, but rather from authors such as Barrès and Maurras.’]

It is telling that Marçal cites a comparison of d’Ors to Charles Maurras, a far-right, notoriously antisemitic French author from the nineteenth century, and Maurice Barrès (equally antisemitic,

<sup>228</sup> Joan Fuster, *Literatura catalana contemporània* (Sant Pol de Mar: Curial, 2015), p. 154.

<sup>229</sup> FMM, box no. 14, file no.7.

<sup>230</sup> Eduard Valentí i Fiol, *Els clàssics i la literatura catalana moderna* (Barcelona: Curial, 1973), p. 50.

<sup>231</sup> FMM, box no. 14, file no.7.

famously involved in the Affaire Dreyfus).<sup>232</sup> The reasons why Marçal criticizes d'Ors' interpretations of the Classic ideals of aesthetic symmetry and philosophical idealism based on anti-Semitic nationalism is not, however, the "infidelity" to the "original" model. What Marçal opposes to is the fact that Eugeni d'Ors' 'Classic' style, apart from being ideologically problematic, undermines what he claims.

More Maragallian than Orsian herself, Marçal questioned many of Eugeni d'Ors' ideas. In her own poetry, she revisited and transformed the Maragallian 'living word,' as well as many other symbols associated with Christianity. Marçal not only used, as mentioned earlier, the dialectal vocabulary of the region, but she also painted images of the local feasts, such as the bonfires of the night of St John, the country girls peeling potatoes, her school friends, the songs they sung,<sup>233</sup> even the graffiti painted on the local roads.<sup>234</sup> Over time, the poet got interested in other, more 'cultured' literary uses of the language, such as the sonnet, the Sapphic stanza, the *sextina*, only to return, just before her death, to the Maragallian concept of the 'living word.'

In contrast to her early poems, rich in local details, Marçal's last poems, published posthumously, are minimalist and 'purified.' In her diary, written after getting diagnosed with cancer, the poet challenges the idea that written word can ever be 'living' or alive. She refers to writing as 'posing for death': 'Sé que, passi el que passi, he començat a posar per la mort. [...] Només sé veure la mort com el punt final d'un relat —i no hi ha relat sense punt final—.'<sup>235</sup> ('I know that, whatever happens, I have started to pose for death. [...] I can only see death as a full stop, the end of a story – and there is no story without a final full stop.') In one of the last poems she quotes the concept of the living word directly: 'Cos meu: què em dius? | Com un crucificat | parles per boca de ferida | que no vol pellar | fins a cloure's en la mudesa: | inarticulada | paraula

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<sup>232</sup> In his article on supernationalism, Epps deconstructs Barrés' anti-Semitic figurations, especially the figure of the wandering Jew: 'overused as it is, the figure brings to mind in the modern tradition not merely Eugene Sue's *Le juif errant* (1844-45), but also, and more elliptically, Maurice Barrés's *Les déracinés* (1897), the first part of a trilogy significantly titled *Le Roman de l'énergie nationale*. [...] For Barrés, uprootedness is not a positive quality; quite the contrary, it is both the cause and the effect of a serious depletion of 'national energy,' a matter of dissolution and decay, a phenomenon to be combated at all cost. Against a presumably uprooted intellectualism Barrés advances a renewed appreciation of sentiment, rooted in the individual subject. [...] So, against wandering Jews and errant intellectuals, Barrés champions a sentimentally inflected nationalism in which the firmly situated I, the land, and the dead (who return to the land) have supreme value.' (See: Brad Epps, 'Before Postnationalism: Supernationalism, Modernisme, and Catalonia,' in *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, Vol. 7 (2003), p. 141.)

<sup>233</sup> Julià, pp. 34-35.

<sup>234</sup> Julià, p. 193.

<sup>235</sup> Maria-Mercè Marçal, *El senyal de la pèrdua. Escrits inèdits dels últims anys. Dietari – cartes a Jean-Paul Goujon* (Barcelona: Empúries, 2014), p. 22-27.

viva.<sup>236</sup> ('Body of mine: what are you telling me? | As if you were crucified | you speak through the mouth of a wound | that does not want to heal | until it closes in the inarticulate | dumbness: | the living word.') In the poem, the lyrical 'I' tries to communicate with her body, but the body's language is not linguistic, therefore not understandable to the mind. The body speaks through an open wound, it speaks the language of pain. The pain becomes the synonym of life and communication and the living word is the silence of a closed wound, which also symbolizes death. Marçal defies the Maragallian principle of the Word as a gift from God, which symbolizes the human superiority over other living beings. In her last poems, she speaks of death as an ultimate act of openness, of embracing one's own materiality and therefore acknowledging the humans' connection with the non-human world. She writes: 'Res no et serà pres: vindrà tan sols | l'instant d'obrir | dòcilment la mà | i alliberar | la memoria de l'aigua | perquè es retrobi aigua | d'alta mar.'<sup>237</sup> ('Nothing will be taken from you: only | the moment will come to open | meekly your hand | and release | memory of water | so it may rejoin water | in high seas.')<sup>238</sup> Just like the fetus was sailing in the waters of the mother's womb, the material rests of a person, the dust he or she will become, will dissolve into the water, into the rain, in the high seas of the great uterus of the Earth. The dying lyrical 'I' imagines death as a reconnection with the uterus of the God-mother, as she writes the following verses, mentioned in the introduction: 'Morir: potser només | perdre forma i contorns | desfer-se, ser | xuclada endins | de l'úter viu, | matriu de déu | mare: desnéixer.'<sup>239</sup> (To die: perhaps only to | lose shape and outline | to undo oneself, to be | swallowed inside | the uterus alive, | god's womb, | mother: to become unborn.')<sup>240</sup>

The ultimate act of letting go, requires of the subject to give up her human individuality, sanctioned by the traditional understanding of the figure of God. God, conventionally imagined as a male figure, in the poems of *Rao del cos*, is but an usurper of the mother's legacy. It is the mother who, in another poem, offers her flesh and blood to the child. The lyrical 'I' addresses her mother to thank her for her sacrifice: 'Vas dir-me: aquest | és el meu cos, | la meva sang. | Pren, menja i beu | — vida i mortalla.'<sup>241</sup> ('You said to me: this | is my body | my blood. | Take,

<sup>236</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 496.

<sup>237</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 482.

<sup>238</sup> Marçal, *The Body's Reason*, p. 49.

<sup>239</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 483.

<sup>240</sup> Marçal, *The Body's Reason*, p. 51.

<sup>241</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 489.

eat and drink | — life and shroud.’)<sup>242</sup> The mother’s offering of her own body occurs ‘Sota l’esguard | obscè d’un déu | que t’usurpava | les paraules’<sup>243</sup> (‘Under the obscene | look of a god | that usurped | your words.’)<sup>244</sup> If the word is alive, in Marçal’s posthumous poetry, it is not because it is a gift from God that symbolizes immortality. On the contrary, the poet’s word offers an invitation to an individual, perishable life; it is an intimate act of hospitality as extreme as to invite the reader to witness the author’s dying.

### **The Dragon’s Blood: Monstrosity and Womanhood**

Almost a century after Maragall’s lecture, Marçal revisited his words. In a speech in the Ateneu Barcelonès, where Maragall had given his speech, Marçal speaks of “monstrosity” in literature in an essay titled ‘Elogi del drac,’ alluding to Maragall’s ‘Elogi de la paraula,’ which contains, as mentioned previously, Maragall’s conception of the “living word,” an expression of God’s presence. In her essay, Marçal praises the body, not in relation to a metaphysical figure of God, but in reference to the blood, which symbolizes the mythical dragon’s passion in the legend of Sant Jordi, patron saint of Catalonia and of the Catalan literary fair celebrated every 23<sup>rd</sup> of April. According to the legend, the courageous Saint George kills the dragon to save a helpless princess. When the dragon’s blood falls onto the earth, roses spring up that are symbolic of literature. But for Marçal, the dragon symbolizes the “monstrosity” and abjection of the irrational, the material, the feminine, but also the non-human:

La sang del drac [...] com a origen de l’escriptura literària. Aquest drac que ressorgeix cíclicament i que, fins i tot decapitat, és capaç de fer néixer la bellesa, perquè allò que ens diu la seva mort ritual és la seva pervivència aferriada, la seva resurrecció inevitable, més enllà de la voluntat que domina i de la raó que exclou. Perquè el drac és, per a mi, la imatge de tot allò que és exclòs, i allò que és exclòs retorna en forma d’amenaça, de força obscura, d’enemic.<sup>245</sup>

[The dragon’s blood [...] as the origin of literary creation. This dragon which rises cyclically and which, even decapitated, is capable of giving birth to beauty. Because its ritual death tells us the story of a persistent survival, of an inevitable resurrection, beyond the scope of reason that excludes or will that dominates. Because the dragon is, to me, the image of all that which is excluded, and what is excluded returns in the form of a threat, a dark force, an enemy.]

<sup>242</sup> Marçal, *The Body’s Reason*, p. 61.

<sup>243</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 489.

<sup>244</sup> Marçal, *The Body’s Reason*, p. 61.

<sup>245</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2004), p. 37.

Life, to which the expression *paraula viva*, in Marçal's essay becomes an embodied image. Marçal's rendering of the Sant Jordi myth allows for numerous, at times contradictory interpretations, as it expresses resistance against symbolic petrification. On the one hand, Marçal seemed suspicious of Maragall's linguistic claims – in one of her PhD drafts Marçal describes Maragall's vision of language as pre-Fabrian and suggests that she does not entirely agree with it; she herself rigorously adheres to the rules of the currently accepted grammar by Institut d'Estudis Catalans, largely based on Pompeu Fabra's groundbreaking work.<sup>246</sup> However, by entitling her discourse 'Elogi del drac,' she creates a link with Maragall's speech, thus appreciating its philosophical potential. In Marçal's essay, the Maragallian spring of life becomes the flow of blood, the act of creation is the act of giving birth, of menstruating; blood, the stains of blood become a metaphorical trace of life, and thus of literature. The dragon, although repeatedly decapitated with every telling of the legend, comes back to life, and with the blood of its neck it proclaims a more carnal form of writing. As a woman who writes, Marçal identifies with the bleeding dragon:

Si com a escriptora sento que les meves arrels s'enfondeixen en la sang del drac, com a dona no puc oblidar que el femení, més enllà de la pobra representació de la donzella salvada per l'heroi, ha quedat exclòs històricament en la nostra civilització i es troba, també, a la banda del monstre.<sup>247</sup>

[If, as a writer, I feel that my roots are immersed in the dragon's blood, as a woman I cannot forget that the feminine gender, apart from the representation of the poor girl saved by the hero, has been historically excluded from our civilization and is now located on the side of the monster.]

In Marçal's speech, the bleeding dragon becomes a figure born of patriarchal and anthropocentric othering – a very different claim from Maragall's praise of the word as the sign of human superiority over other living beings as granted by God. The "inhuman" dragon, when rendered by Marçal, becomes strikingly human, a strange, complex, and endangered species worthy of preservation.

The critique of the patriarchal understandings of "monstrosity," for Marçal, also includes dialoguing with different kinds of women writers. In the essay 'En dansa obliqua de miralls: Pauline M. Tarn (Renée Vivien), Caterina Albert (Víctor Català) i Maria Antònia Salvà,' Marçal

<sup>246</sup> FMMM, box no. 14, file no. 7.

<sup>247</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2004), p. 37.



also looks for feminist potential in metaphors of monstrosity and survival. In her interpretation of the poetry of Mallorcan writer Maria-Antònia Salvà, Marçal writes the following:

Amb més capacitat d'adaptació al medi i de supervivència, Maria-Antònia Salvà mostra la seva diferència amb la imatge grotesca i repulsiva d'un cactus que, convertit en 'rèptil monstruós' que esquerda test i terra, reneix arrapat a l'àrida bellesa del paisatge de la plana llucmajorenca.<sup>248</sup>

[With more capacity for environment adaptation and survival, Maria-Antònia Salvà shows her difference with the repulsive and grotesque image of a cactus which, turned into a 'monstrous reptile' which cracks the pot and the ground, is reborn enveloped in the arid beauty of the landscape of Lluçmajorca.]

Here Marçal confronts another patriarchal stereotype regarding women writers: apart from being deemed 'irrational,' reduced to materiality or personal experience, women's creation is often perceived as 'naive,' as if literary innovation or philosophical depth were reserved for men (or more precisely to bourgeois men from Barcelona.) In her essay on Salvà, apart from attending to metaphors of survival, Marçal further complicates the debate on the evolution of Catalan language with respect to *modernisme* and *noucentisme* by reinterpreting the *Escola Mallorquina*, the poetic group associated with traditionalist and rural tendencies in Mallorca<sup>249</sup> from the first half of the twentieth century until the 1950s.<sup>250</sup> Salvà, a female member of the *Escola Mallorquina*, was reductively read as a poet of rural simplicity and Mediterranean landscapes, in contrast to male poets associated with the *Escola*, whom Joan Fuster describes as focused on elegant and balanced form.<sup>251</sup> With regards to Salvà, Fuster speaks of *ingenuïtat*, 'naivety'<sup>252</sup> or *incauta veracitat* 'unwary veracity.' But for Marçal, the images in Salvà open up to complex constellations of meanings. In Marçal's reading, Salvà, who lived in the Francoist Catalonia and, because she chose not to marry and to take up a writing career, was often "accused" of lesbianism, uses the symbol of the cactus to represent both survival and the 'monstrous' otherness of women who write, excluded both from the writing community and from society more generally. A woman writer who objects to becoming a mere reproductive tool, becomes,

<sup>248</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2004), p. 22.

<sup>249</sup> Marçal made several attempts to push against the Barcelona-focused context of the Catalan language debate, for example, she also decided to publish *Terra de mai* and later her collected poems, in Valencia; as mentioned earlier, Marçal took inspiration from various Valencian and Balearic authors.

<sup>250</sup> 'Escola Mallorquina,' in *Gran enciclopèdia de la llengua catalana* <<https://www.enciclopedia.cat/ec-gec-0229611.xml>> [accessed 12 August 2020]

<sup>251</sup> Fuster, p. 57.

<sup>252</sup> Fuster, p. 57.

like the dragon from the Sant Jordi myth, monstrous and abject, almost inhuman, '[p]el simple fet d'haver agafat la ploma, dreçant-se contra el silenci secularment assignat al sexe femení. Amb el que això tenia de "monstruós," és a dir de susceptible de ser mostrat per la seva excepcionalitat o raresa'<sup>253</sup> ('for the simple fact of having grabbed the pen, of rising above the silence assigned over the centuries to the female sex. With all the "monstrosity" of the gesture, that is to say, its propensity for being put on display for its exceptionality or strangeness.') In Catalan, the verb *mostrar*, 'to show' or 'to display,' preserves its etymological affinity with *monstre*: 'monster,' which Marçal utilizes to illustrate the reasons to reject women writers and writing by women. The presumed 'monstrosity' of women writers is arguably a symptom of patriarchal angst; their social abjection is a backlash reaction in response to their courage to publicly show themselves as subjects who claim agency. The motif of feminine monstrosity also brings to mind Renée Vivien's 'The Crocodile Lady,'<sup>254</sup> a short story written from the point of view of a male narrator, in which the agency, the sexual dominance in a woman —this time depicted as a crocodile— has caused such deep fear in the masculine character that he felt compelled to carve her eyes out. Marçal's reading of Salva's reptile could, perhaps, also be inflected by her reading of Vivien's crocodile woman.

Marçal based her reading of monstrosity on Salvà's poem 'D'un cactus,' which she translated into French.<sup>255</sup> The poem reads:

Com rèptil monstruós de pell clapada,  
d'entranya llefiscosa, era ajocat  
al seu racó bevent la solellada.  
De sobte, sa malícia desvetllada,  
enrevisclant-se va esquerdar el test.  
Enllà de l'hort, que se'n perdés el quest,  
dalt una paret seca fou llençat,  
i al cap de temps, damunt les pedres dures,  
furgant per les llivanyes i juntures,  
trobí el vell drac encara aferrisat.'<sup>256</sup>

[Like a monstrous reptile with spotted skin, | with slimy entrails, it lay| in its corner  
drinking in the sunlight. | All at once, its malice awakened, | reviving, it cracked the  
flowerpot. | Beyond the orchard, to be lost track of, | it was hurled over an arid wall, | and

<sup>253</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac*, p. 87.

<sup>254</sup> See: Renée Vivien, *The Woman of the Wolf And Other Stories*, trans. by Karla Jay and Ivonne M. Klein (New York: Gay Presses of New York, 1983), pp. 70-71. The book was published for the first time in French in 1904 as *La Dame à la louve*.

<sup>255</sup> Marçal, *El senyal de la pèrdua*, p. 132.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

after a time, upon rugged stones, | poking among the crevices and seams, | I found the old dragon still raging and clinging.]<sup>257</sup>

Marçal interprets the comparison between a cactus and a monstrous reptile in Salvà's poem as an allusion to the difficult position of women writers. In a letter to Jean-Paul Goujon, Marçal describes Salvà with tenderness and respect, as 'aquella vella dama tan amable, amb el seu ocell'<sup>258</sup> who 'va ser cruelment caricaturitzada en una novel·la molt remarcable [...] *Mort de dama* de Llorenç Villalonga.'<sup>259</sup> Marçal attributes Salvà's relative loss of popularity to a suspicion of lesbianism, a conviction that she also expresses in 'En dansa obliqua de miralls...' She also describes her efforts, together with other women writers, to publish new editions of Salvà's works. In response to Salvà's image of the resilient cactus-reptile, Marçal writes another poem:

Furgant per les llivanyes i juntures  
d'aquesta paret seca, entre mac  
i mac d'oblit, entre les pedres dures  
de cega desmemòria que endures,  
et sé. I em sé, en el mirall fidel  
del teu poema, aferrissadament  
clivellar pedra de silenci opac  
—dona rèptilm dona monstre, dona drac,  
com el cactus, com tu, supervivent.<sup>260</sup>

[poking among the crevices and seams | of this arid wall, between pebble | and pebble of oblivion, between the hard rocks | of the blind forgetfulness that you endure, | I know you. And I know myself [reflected] in the faithful mirror | of your poem, raging | cracking the rock of the opaque silence. | Woman-reptile, woman-monster, woman-dragon: like you, I am a survivor.]

The poem contains a recurrent motif in Marçal's earlier readings of other writers: a mirror, which, in later work, she will perceive as a utopian symbol, in that it suggests the possibility of a mutual, almost unmediated comprehension and complementariness between two authors (I explore the importance of mirrors in the poet's imagery in more detail in the last chapter of this thesis). The poem also constitutes a testimony of Marçal's reading of Salvà's poem on survival, interpreting Salvà's metaphors more explicitly in the context of literature and feminism. It is an

<sup>257</sup> *Survivors*, selected and transl. by D. Sam Abrams, 'Beacon Literature Series' (Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Nord-Americans, 1991), p. 13.

<sup>258</sup> Marçal, *El senyal de la pèrdua*, p. 130.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Marçal, *El senyal de la pèrdua*, p. 133.

example of Marçal's open-ended dialogues with other writers, in which, rather than chasing the idea of originality at all costs or, as Harold Bloom might suggest, succumbing to the 'anxiety of influence,' she opens a dialogue with Salvà's vision of survival, a dialogue that, rather than confrontational, is aimed at seeking intersections, influences and permeabilities, 'rummaging amongst the fissures and junctions' of this dry, seemingly barren wall that is the 'Western canon.'

Marçal reads Salvà's monster, the cactus, the reptile, as a non-human metaphor of exclusion and survival, but also, perhaps, of inter-species solidarity. It may be that the human-reptile creature takes pride in its role, not unlike Susan Stryker's transsexual monster, (like Marçal, Stryker also points to the etymological affiliation between 'monster' and 'show' or 'demonstrate.') For Stryker, there is no shame in being seen, 'acknowledging [one's] egalitarian relationship with non-human material Being.'<sup>261</sup> The message that the monster-writer transmits resembles the 'monstrous' message of the trans person, as voiced by Stryker, and it goes like this:

You are as constructed as me; the same anarchic womb has birthed us both. I call upon you to investigate your nature as I have been compelled to confront mine. I challenge you to risk abjection and flourish as well as have I. Heed my words, and you may well discover the seams and sutures in yourself.<sup>262</sup>

The monster who, in Stryker's 'words to Victor Frankenstein,' challenges the limits of cis-normative logic, is inherently related to those literary narratives that take both patriarchy and anthropocentrism for granted.

The metaphor of women-survivors also has a more personal meaning for Marçal. In 1991, she participated in the presentation of *Survivors*, a bilingual anthology of modern women poets in Catalan, translated into English, which contained poems by Maria-Antònia Salvà, Clementina Arderiu, Rosa Leveroni, Montserrat Abelló, Maria Àngels Anglada, Margarita Ballester, Felícia Fuster, Marta Pessarodona, and Marçal. The title was inspired by Tillie Olsen's statement on women writers: 'we who write are survivors.'<sup>263</sup> However, a month after the presentation of *Survivors*, Marçal was due to present *El volcà* ('The Volcano'), a book of poems,

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<sup>261</sup> Susan Stryker, 'My words to Victor Frankenstein above the village of Chamounix. Performing transgender rage,' in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (Duke University Press: 1994), Vol. 1, p. 240.

<sup>262</sup> Stryker, p. 241.

<sup>263</sup> Julià, p. 373.

which was published posthumously. The author, Anna Dodas, met with Marçal, who had insisted on granting Dodas the Amadeu Oller literary prize for her first book of poems *Paisatge amb hivern*. Soon after the event, Dodas was murdered at the age of twenty three with her friend, also a young woman, while travelling close to Montpellier in the summer of 1986.<sup>264</sup> Marçal has not forgotten Dodas and kept mentioning her work on multiple occasions and at various events, she also dedicated an essay to *El volcà*,<sup>265</sup> as if attempting to make the memory of the young poem survive, in spite of the feminicide that the author fell victim to.

### On ‘Women’s Writing’

Questions might arise regarding Marçal’s tendency, especially in her early poetry, to draw on canonized, largely patriarchal symbolic registers of nature, irrationality, corporeality, and domestic imagery. In this section, I examine these and other apparent “contradictions” between patriarchal, binary poetic imageries and feminist protocols in Marçal’s early poetry.

In his article on the politics of Marçal’s early poetry, Josep Anton Fernández touches upon the symbolic division into the rational, associated with men, and the irrational, natural, bodily, untamed, associated with women.<sup>266</sup> Fernández reads Marçal in the light of the debate between French feminists regarding feminism of difference. He understandably links Marçal to Cixous’ conception of *écriture féminine* and Irigaray’s *parler femme*, in that Marçal does speak openly about the difficulties of ‘women’ who write, as discussed in the previous section. Fernández confronts the notion of ‘women’s writing’ with the following affirmation by Monique Wittig: ‘That there is no “feminine writing” must be said at the outset, and one makes a mistake in using and giving currency to this expression.’<sup>267</sup> There is a difference, however, between talking about ‘feminine writing’ and ‘women who write.’ In her essay ‘Qui sóc i per què escric’ (‘Who I am and why I write’) that is precisely how Marçal identifies herself: ‘Sóc algú —una dona— que escriu’<sup>268</sup> (‘I am someone – a woman – who writes.’) Wittig opposes to the term ‘feminine writing’ because she considers it ‘is the naturalizing metaphor of the brutal political fact of the

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<sup>264</sup> Julià, p. 374.

<sup>265</sup> Julià, p. 376.

<sup>266</sup> Josep-Anton Fernández, ‘Subversió, transició, tradició: política i subjectivitat a la primera poesia de Maria-Mercè Marçal’, *Lectora*, 10 (2004), p. 202

<sup>267</sup> Monique Wittig, ‘Point of view: Universal or Particular?’, *Feminist Issues* vol. 3 (1983), p. 63. <<https://doi-org.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/10.1007/BF02685543>> [accessed 10 July 2020]

<sup>268</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2020), p. 29.

domination of women, and as such it enlarges the apparatus under which “femininity” presents itself: that is, Difference, Specificity, Female Body/Nature.’<sup>269</sup> While, in writing about the body, the menstrual blood, the birth, or reclaiming the figure of the mother, Marçal may poeticize women’s bodies, it is also clear from her opposition to treating women writers as abject and monstrous that she sees femininity as a socially constructed category, the perceptions of which stem from cultural associations attributed to cis women’s bodily functions. Wittig writes that

Gender is the linguistic index of the political opposition between the sexes. Gender is used here in the singular because indeed there are not two genders. There is only one: the feminine, the ‘masculine’ not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine but the general.<sup>270</sup>

The non-marked or universalized masculine in language is precisely what Marçal complained about when she talked about the ‘inherited disadvantage,’ as I argued in the first chapter of this work. Moreover, Marçal’s call to demystify and de-stigmatize the physiology of cis women’s bodies such as menstrual bleeding or giving birth, which I address in the previous section of this chapter, can hardly be interpreted as reducing women intellectuals to ‘Female Body/Nature.’

This is, of course, a simplification, as Marçal herself rarely uses the term ‘women’ as a generic category. More often than not, she talks about particular women writers. Marçal’s work, especially her earlier poetry, has traditionally been read in the spirit of the feminism of difference, which focused on the sexual difference between women and men, especially in Italy and France. The philosopher Luisa Muraro and the circle of founders of *Libreria delle donne* in Milan (the first women’s bookshop in Italy, founded in 1975) were important references for Marçal thanks to the research circle at the University of Barcelona dedicated to philosophy and gender, led by Marçal’s partner Fina Birulès. Noèlia Díaz Vicedo points to the influence of those second wave, Italian feminists in Marçal’s work, focusing especially on the conviction that women ‘were still experiencing a feeling of inadequacy [...] described by women from *Llibreria* as a feeling of “estrangement,”’<sup>271</sup> which occurs when a woman ‘cannot find social representations of her own desires.’<sup>272</sup> In order to navigate ‘the complex interaction between the female body and the linguistic system,’ female references are needed by women, hence the need

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<sup>269</sup> Wittig, ‘Point of view,’ p. 64.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Noèlia Díaz Vicedo, *Constructing Feminine Poetics in the Works of a Late-20th-century Woman Poet: Maria-Mercè Marçal* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2014), pp. 22-23.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

proclaimed by the *Llibreria* feminists to introduce the practice of entrustment (*affidamento*), according to which a “student” entrusts her desire to a woman mentor’s guide.<sup>273</sup> This practice reflects the order of the mother, typical of Italian feminism of the time. Alfons Gregori also points to the importance of the essay *Et l’une ne bouge pas sans l’autre* (1979) by Luce Irigaray to understand the metaphors of the mother-daughter relationships in Marçal’s poetry. The work of Hélène Cixous is equally worth mentioning in the context of women’s desire in Marçal’s poetry (I dedicate more space to Marçal’s dialogues with Cixous in the next section of this chapter and in Chapter Three). While the feminism of difference caused controversy, especially among critics dedicated to posthumanism and queer theory, I would like to argue that Marçal’s feminist affiliations could be linked to more than one line of thought.

Marçal’s readings of other women writers (and especially of the ways in which women’s desire is depicted in their work) could be read along the lines of ‘entrustment,’ they could also be seen as figurations of the symbolic mother-daughter bonds that link Marçal’s own writing to the writing of her predecessors. Dialogues between different women writers seemed to Marçal one of the possible axes to look for transnational, multilingual links. As Catalan literary critic Joana Sabadell Nieto observes:

Marçal reanuda la comunicació con voces femeninas discontinuadas por las historias de la literatura [...], tanto mediante préstamos que incorpora a sus propios versos, como mediante traducciones o estudios de las mismas. Este es el caso de sus ensayos sobre Clementina Arderiu, Rosa Leveroni, Isabel de Villena, las poetisas catalanas, de la Yourcenar, Anna Akhmatova, Leonor Fini, Marina Tsvetaeva y otras.<sup>274</sup>

[Marçal resumes the communication with feminine voices, discontinued by the histories of literature [...], both through loans incorporated into her own verses and by translations or studies of their work. Such is the case of her essays on Clementina Arderiu, Rosa Leveroni, Isabel de Villena, the Catalan poets, of Yourcenar, of Anna Akhmatova, Leonor Fini, Marina Tsvetaeva and others.]

Marçal entitled her collected poems *Llengua abolida* (“Abolished language”) – a metaphor that she employs to reflect on the mechanisms of multiple minoritization in language and literature. Although a firm believer in retrieving and fostering literary connections between women across languages, spaces and time, Marçal is far from postulating the existence of a common,

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<sup>273</sup> Díaz Vicedo, p. 24.

<sup>274</sup> Joana Sabadell Nieto, ‘Maria-Mercè Marçal: pasión y poesía del feminismo’, in *Literatura y feminismo en España (s. XV-XXI)*, ed. Lisa Wollendorf (Barcelona: Icaria, 2005), p. 330.

monolithic ‘feminine experience.’<sup>275</sup> She resolutely states that ‘No hi ha una “experiència genialment femenina” que es digui en les obres de les dones, a punt perquè nosaltres la hi descobrim: per això he parlat d’indícis i fragments,’ ([t]here is no “feminine experience” par excellence, ready for us to discover in works written by women, that is why I speak of fragments and indices.’)<sup>276</sup>

Because there is no “feminine experience” nor “feminine writing,” Marçal reads different kinds of women who understand womanhood in varying, sometimes mutually exclusive ways. In a comparative essay on two Catalan poets, Rosa Leveroni (1910-1985) and Clementina Arderiu (1889-1976), Marçal makes a hypothesis that the two authors would probably not have liked being compared, as their convictions on what it means to be a woman and their poetic imagery were radically different. Rosa Leveroni was a woman who decided not to marry, she worked, she did not reject love in spite of not putting marital constraints to it.<sup>277</sup> Caterina Arderiu, on the other hand, was a writer and a housewife, she is often forgotten as a poet and relegated to the role of ‘the wife of...’ (Carles Riba, a distinguished poet).<sup>278</sup> Marçal discreetly (or perhaps deliberately) omits the mention that in fact both women were related to Riba – one, as his wife and the other, as his lover.<sup>279</sup> In her essay they, not Riba, are the main protagonists who are read in the context of the Catalan and Classical canon.

Marçal pays special attention to the representation of desire in Arderiu and Leveroni. The symbolic language used to describe the sea and journey, which differs significantly in both

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<sup>275</sup> Indeed, as Marçal’s lifelong partner, the philosopher Fina Birulès observes, the notion of experience, and especially the ‘experience of the Other’ is always already complex. Originally the notion of experience, from the Latin *ex-perior*, had the connotations of an active engagement: an experiment, an examination or recognition. Gradually the meaning has expanded to include a receptive aspect, until reaching its current use: to experience something often means to ‘feel’ – as opposed to ‘think.’ Birulès mentions two of the many angles from which the concept of ‘experience’ is looked at in modern philosophy. On the one hand, it can be understood in relationship with the ‘loss of experience’ (Benjamin, Agamben, Koselleck), the impossibility to transmit what one has experienced and, in consequence, the subject’s inability to preserve the historic memory of an event or a phenomenon. Such understanding of experience, closely related to repetition and continuity, can also open a space for distortion or twisting of the message or the original account as a result of repeating and reformulating. It is intrinsically related to loss, one that the writing subject has to embrace in order to preserve the memory throughout the account. The second use discussed by Birulès, the ‘immediate experience’ of an act in all its particularity, as understood by Hannah Arendt, carries a series of meanings which seem to contradict the definition mentioned above. The directness of experience, as opposed to an experience which has been lost, comes from a confrontation that occurs ‘here’ and ‘now’, it is always new and unfamiliar. Because of the complexity of the concept, Birulès argues that it should not be employed without acknowledging the history of its evolution. See: Fina Birulès, ‘Notes sobre subjectivitat i experiència,’ in *Lectora* (9/2003), pp. 2-4.

<sup>276</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2004), p. 158.

<sup>277</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2004), p. 64.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Gregori i Gomis, ‘Maria-Mercè Marçal, la miglior fabbra,’ p. 122.



writers, may be related, according to Marçal, to the stereotypes projected on each of the writers depending on the social roles they chose to adopt.<sup>280</sup> In Leveroni's poetry, the poetic 'I,' compared to Ulisses, decides to set off into the sea. Far from idealizing the unmarried woman's freedom from the society's constraints (let us not forget that Leveroni lived through the civil war and the subsequent, most ruthless, phase of Francoism), Marçal reminds the readers that love and passion in Leveroni are only expressed in terms of a distant memory, a yearning. The woman's desire is constrained, it is unavoidably perceived as linked to solitude and death (and, perhaps, insanity).<sup>281</sup> Marçal traces an intertextual dialogue between Leveroni, Ramon Llull and Ausiàch March, two canonical figures of literature in Catalan.<sup>282</sup>

As a poet, Llull was renowned for his poems devoted to the mystical love of God, a vision of love that, expressed in passionate verses, inspired Marçal's understanding of love and death intertwined as two aspects of human, earthly passion. It is in Llull's mystical verses such as 'Vull morir en pèlag d'amor,' ('I want to die in the open ocean of love')<sup>283</sup> that Marçal finds the expression of a self-abandoning passion that borders on madness, to the very degree that it entails the abolition of boundaries between the self and other. Such idea of passion (which I discuss more broadly in Chapter Five), constitutes one of the pillars of Marçal's understanding of the task of a writer, which will be translated into numerous attempts of incorporating the words of other writers into her own work, in a passionate dialogue across languages, times, and places.<sup>284</sup> In her reflections on the work of Rosa Leveroni, Marçal explores the ambivalent relationships between unsatiable desire and death drive in Leveroni's poem 'Elegies dels dies obscurs' ('Elegies of dark days'):

El desig, llavors, és per definició inassolible, i sols pot trobar repòs i alhora acompliment en la mort, encara que, paradoxalment és allò que fa sentir viva la poeta i que s'oposa a la sensació de mort. Dins de la millor tradició romàntica, Rosa Leveroni se serveix, però,

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<sup>280</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2004), p. 64.

<sup>281</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2004), p. 63.

<sup>282</sup> Ramon Llull (1233?-1315), theologian, poet and philosopher born in Mallorca, who intended to create a logical system that was to embrace all fields of knowledge, was an important reference for Marçal. Llull supposedly spoke Arabic better than Latin, as one of his goals was to convert the Arabs to Christianity by means of theological debate. (See: Tadeusz Miłkowski, Paweł Machcewicz, *Historia Hiszpanii* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1998), p. 107.) Llull's gesture —learning the language of the "opponent"— was accompanied by his choice of Catalan, the vernacular, rather than limiting his literary expression to high cultural Latin. This could perhaps be compared to Marçal's renderings of other poets — rarely confrontational or reductive, often characterized by openness and respectful curiosity.

<sup>283</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2004), p. 63.

<sup>284</sup> More on the cross-lingual devouring in Chapters Two and Five.

d'una paràfrasi d'aquell vers de Ramon Llull: 'Vull morir en pèlag d'amor.' Vegem-ho en els darrers versos del poema: '...oh, com voldria | mirar-me dins d'uns ulls, veure-hi la flama | que vaig cercat arreu! En el seu pèlag | trobaria la mort, i fóra dolça, | oh meu obscur destí.'<sup>285</sup>

[The desire, then, is by definition unattainable, and it can only find rest and accomplishment at the same time in death, even though, paradoxically the desire is what makes the poet feel alive; it contradicts the sensation of death. Within the best romantic tradition, Rosa Leveroni uses, however, a paraphrase of the following verse by Ramon Llull: 'I want to die in the open ocean of love.' Let's see this verse in the last verses of [Leveroni's] poem: '...oh, how I would like | to see myself in a pair of eyes, to see a flame in them | that I looked for all around! In their open ocean | I would find death, and oh how sweet | my dark destiny would be.']

The vision of desire as the untamed sea, both powerful and frightening, becomes the main axis of Marçal's reading of Leveroni. Similarly, she reads Arderiu as reluctant to embrace or represent any such desires. The sea, which Marçal describes as an image undomesticated desires, symbolizing 'mort, desig i passió' ('death, desire, and passion'), is, in Arderiu's poetry 'una temptació present —amenaçant!— però fermament rebutjada'<sup>286</sup> ('a temptation that is present – and menacing! – but firmly rejected.) The attitude towards passion that both poets represent – avoidant or desiring, yet always haunted by impossibility— remits a symbolic language of its own, with a vast tradition in Catalan, both conditioned by and parallel to the stereotypes of gender roles. Marçal, respectful of each of the women's life and aesthetic choices, adopts a dialogical and analytical attitude. Her readings of Arderiu and Leveroni offer but one example of the poet's engagement with other women writers, but they are a good illustration of a tendency: one may certainly say that Marçal reads other writers through the optics of those literary motifs and debates that are of personal interest to her, searching, in other women's voices, different views on the issues that she herself investigates. But to say that there is an assumption of a naturalized, 'feminine' way of writing that she attributes to other women would miss the point of Marçal's understanding of both literature and gender. In fact, Marçal also read authors who are not regarded as feminists from a feminist point of view. Isabel de Villena, for instance, was seen by Marçal as the first proto-feminist writer of the Catalan literary canon. Later the abbess of the Valencian monastery *la Trinitat* (Trinity), Villena devoted her life to writing—in Catalan—and to running the monastery. Marçal dedicates an essay to the memory of Isabel de Villena, in

<sup>285</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2004), pp. 63-64. The reference is to Ramon Llull's 'Cant de Ramon.'

<sup>286</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2020), p. 72.

which she analyzes in detail Villena's only known work, *Vita Cristi*, and passionately argues that

la *Vita Christi*, tot i el seu títol, era una obra *de dona*, conscientment, deliberadament *de dona*, si voleu *femenina*, però encara més, *feminista*, adjectiu, és clar, que resulta anacrònic en aplicar-lo a una autora i a una obra del segle XV, però que ens és útil si en precisem l'abast. Perquè la *Vita Christi* villeniana, no tan sols s'interessa pels personatges femenins dels Evangelis d'una manera primordial —en particular per [...] Maria, i per la Magdalena—, sinó que aquest fet determina en gran part la selecció d'episodis que inclou a la seva obra [...]. De tota manera, si l'adjectiu de feminista escau a Isabel de Villena és, sobretot, per la reiterada defensa que fa al llarg de tot el llibre de la dignitat del sexe femení, en clara oposició i potser en deliberada polèmica contra la forta tradició misògina medieval.<sup>287</sup>

[The *Vita Cristi*, in spite of its title, was a *woman's work*, consciously and deliberately written *by a woman*; call it *feminine* if you like, but most of all *feminist*. This adjective is, of course, anachronistic, when we apply it to a writer and to an oeuvre from 15<sup>th</sup> century, but it proves useful if we specify its scope. For not only is Villena's *Vita Cristi* primarily centered around the feminine characters in the Gospels —particularly [...] Mary and the Magdalene—, but it is this focus that determines the selection of scenes in her work. [...] In any case, if the adjective 'feminist' may be attributed to Isabel de Villena it is, most of all, because of the repeated defense of women's dignity that she undertakes throughout her whole book, in clear opposition to, and perhaps in deliberate confrontation with, the powerful, medieval misogynistic tradition.]

Isabel de Villena constitutes the first reference, chronologically speaking, in Marçal's feminist reworking of an otherwise predominantly male canon in which Llull and March enjoy a place of privilege. 'Feminist' in the passage above for Marçal seems to mean 'concerned with equality' or 'acknowledging the work of women,' without pointing to any more specific definitions.

In his article, quoted at the beginning of this section, Fernàndez pondered whether Marçal's feminist slogans may undermine her poetic gestures towards the 'natural,' bodily, or mythical imagery, often used to situate women outside the realm of *logos*. In her early poetry, especially in the first two books of poems that she published (*Cau de llunes* and *Bruixa de dol*), Marçal relies strongly on mystical and natural imagery. For Fernàndez,

L'associació cultural de la dona amb la natura [...] no és només reconeguda, sinó també assumida. En la seva elaboració de la imatgeria tradicional, Marçal destaca alguns termes: els quatre elements, el núvol i la boira [...], la pluja (símbol de la fertilitat i la renovació), la sang, la sal, etc. Per damunt de tot, però, la lluna, amb la seva estreta associació amb el femení: perquè la lluna, com la Dona en els discursos patriarcals, no té llum pròpia, sinó que merament reflecteix la del sol. [...] El mateix es pot dir de

<sup>287</sup> Maria-Mercè Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2004), p.72-73.

l'associació de la dona amb la nit, amb la irracionalitat i amb formes de coneixement tradicionals i il·legítimes com ara el zodíac, la màgia i la bruixeria.<sup>288</sup>

[The cultural association of the woman with nature is [...] not only recognized, but assumed. In her elaboration of traditional imagery, Marçal underscores a few terms: the four elements, clouds and mist [...], rain (symbol of fertility and renovation), blood, salt, etc. Most of all, however, the moon, with its close association to the feminine: because the moon, like Woman in the patriarchal discourse, does not shine with her own light, but only reflects that of the Sun. [...] The same can be said about the association of the woman with the night, the irrational, the traditional and illegitimate forms of knowledge such as the Zodiac, magic and sorcery.]

Fernàndez reads Marçal's early poetry in the context of subverting the patriarchal symbolic space, which he suggests she does not (or not entirely) accomplish, as promised by her openly expressed political convictions, firstly, because *littérature engagée* as a genre is always already problematic, and secondly, because the poet clings to the type of imagery that ties her to the realm of the private, the irrational, the esoteric, the wild, traditionally excluded from the realm of *logos*.<sup>289</sup>

There are plenty of examples of esoteric symbols in Marçal's poems. In *Bruixa de dol* ('Witch in mourning', 1979), Marçal alludes to one of her lifelong inspirations, Josep Vincenç Foix and, specifically, to his book of poems *De sol, i de dol* ('Of the sun, and of mourning', 1947). Needless to say, Marçal does not incorporate Foix's imagery "as is," especially with regard to the representation of women. The woman that, in one of Foix's sonnets, is represented as a flower, an object of the poet's gaze ('flor d'incorrupta natura, forma uniforme amb semença de ment',<sup>290</sup> 'flower of an uncorroded nature, with the mind's seed,') in Marçal's *Bruixa de dol* begins to speak and move. Marçal writes in one of the poems from the cycle 'Foguera joana,' in *Bruixa de dol*,

Els meus pits són dos ocells engabiats  
quan els teus dits els cerquen  
per entre les fulles i les flors del vestit.  
Però quan fulles i flors cauen a terra  
—que el desig porta dalla!—,  
són dos peixos que et fugen de les mans  
en les crestes nevades de la mar.<sup>291</sup>

<sup>288</sup> Fernàndez, p. 205.

<sup>289</sup> Fernàndez, pp. 202-208.

<sup>290</sup> Foix, p. 86.

<sup>291</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 97.

[My breasts are two caged birds | when your fingers seek them | between the leaves and flowers of the dress. | But when the leaves and flowers fall to the ground | —desire carries a scythe!— | they are two fishes that escape your hands | in the snowy peaks of the sea.]

In an untitled sonnet by J.V. Foix, the woman is associated with the sea, the night, and savage uncontrollability: ‘Deixem les fosques xarxes! Quin oblit | De tot, dona, per tu! present, despulles, | Nuesa eterna, cels i mar. I embulles | L’encesa cabellera de la Nit’<sup>292</sup> (‘Let us abandon the dark nets! What oblivion | Of everything, oh woman, for you! Present, you undress | eternal nudity, the skies and the sea. And you entangle | The flaming hair of the Night.’) In both Foix and Marçal, we encounter a woman, metaphorically linked to plants, weather, water, passionate desires. In one, Foix, she is a mute object of observation, a wild, uncontrolled force impossible to understand, while in the other, Marçal, she speaks and moves vigorously, according to her will; in one, the association with “nature” is attributed to the woman, in the other, the association is her choice. This is not to say that J.V. Foix’s “intention” was to exoticize or objectify women, or to relegate them to materiality: as we know from his sonnets, he, like many other male references that Marçal cherished, gladly identified himself with the sea, water, and turbulent desires.

In his reading of Marçal’s early poetry, Alfons Gregori points to the links between her poetry and the imagery of Jacint Verdaguer, one of the most renowned poets of the Catalan *Renaixença*:

zaangażowany wiersz wykorzystujący motyw wiedźm i czarownic zyskuje inny wymiar, gdy weźmiemy pod uwagę, że najwybitniejszy poeta katalońskiego romantyzmu, Jacint Verdaguer, napisał bardzo znany i ceniony poemat epicki [...] zatytułowany *Canigó*. W poemacie tym cudowny świat wróżek i wiedźm zostaje zniszczony, w miarę jak naprzód posuwa się armia chrześcijańska walcząca w ramach rekonkwisty. W tych okolicznościach przedstawienie wróżek jako symbolu pożądanej rzeczywistości feministycznej stanowi krytyczne przywołanie katolickiego modelu nacjonalizmu, opartego na usunięciu inności, tego, co obce.<sup>293</sup>

[a politically engaged poem that uses the motif of the witches acquires a different dimension, if we take into account the fact that the most accomplished poet of Catalan *Renaixença*, Jacint Verdaguer, wrote a very well-known and appreciated epic poem [...] entitled *Canigó*. In the poem, the miraculous world of fairies and witches is destroyed as the Christian army moves forward, fighting in the *reconquista*. Under those circumstances, to represent fairies as a symbol the desired feminist reality is a critical evocation of the Catholic model of nationalism, which is based on erasing otherness, all

<sup>292</sup> Foix, p. 88.

<sup>293</sup> Gregori i Gomis, ‘Maria-Mercè Marçal, la miglior fabbra,’ p. 131.

that is different.

From Gregori's reading, we may perhaps infer that Marçal's magical-feminist imagery treats feminism as a tool to *work on*, disorient or queer certain visions of Catalan nation. Poems such as 'Avui, sabeu?, les fades i les bruixes s'estimen' ('You know, today the fairies and the witches love each other') or 'Cançó de fer camí' ('A song to make one's way') problematize and destabilize the links of Catalan nationalism and Catholic faith, as summarized in Josep Torras i Bagès' categorical 'Catalunya serà cristiana o no serà' ('Catalonia will be Christian or it will not be'). Marçal's affirmative reading of the witches allows her readers to orient or situate themselves, but also to query the cultural signpost of the *Renaixença* in its attachment to a specific religion. In reviving the witches, Marçal situates her poems within a tradition, allowing the readers to perceive 'how one's background affects what it is that comes into view, as well as how the background is what allows what comes into view to be viewed,'<sup>294</sup> as Sara Ahmed put it. The orientalized others of Verdaguer's *Canigó*, expelled during the Christian 'reconquest' of the peninsula, are thus situated, along women, witches, fairies, and other others, in the margins of the Christian version of being European, in the Orient, never here and always 'out there.'

While Marçal's early poems may not explicitly disorient, query or queer the marginalized position of women (or racialized others) in the symbolic space, they do as much as situating the limits that restrict women's access to the symbolic, the rational, the canonical. 'It is not up to queers to disorient straights,'<sup>295</sup> as Ahmed affirms, and it is perhaps too convenient to demand of feminists to constantly take on the work of explaining themselves to avoid the suspicion of patriarchy. However, 'disorientation might still happen, and we do "do" this work. Disorientation would not be a politics of the will, but an effect of how we do politics, which in turn is shaped by a prior matter — simply, how we live.'<sup>296</sup>

Marçal's books are indeed in line with Ahmed's acknowledgement of the political importance of the personal. They are full of personally political references through which the poet, rather than assuming the God-like understanding of the figure of the poet, shows herself as a vulnerable writing subject, as a compassionate narrator. (I am using the word "narrator" instead of "poetic I" not by mistake, but in reference to the discourse pronounced in 2019 by the Nobel-

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<sup>294</sup> Sara Ahmed, 'Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology,' in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Volume 12, Number 4, 2006, p. 547.

<sup>295</sup> Ahmed, 'Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology,' p. 569.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

prize winning Olga Tokarczuk, the main topic of which was “the tender narrator.”) I do agree with Tokarczuk when she speaks of the aesthetic and political need for the feeling, empathizing narrators, narrators that, I would add, question the stigma of “weakness” or “fragility” in order to claim the power that resides in those styles of narrating that emerge from a vulnerable writing subject and aim to elicit solidarity. A similar understanding of the writer’s task may constitute the reason why Marçal consistently ‘invites’ the readers to her life, why she claims the importance of the private to become public. The hospitality of Marçal’s poetics does not mean, however, that it should be reduced to a generic label of ‘feminine.’

In inviting her readers to witness her life, the Catalan poet invites them to reflect on exclusion, and on its consequences for mental health. In Marçal’s poem ‘Xera’ (‘Exhilaration’ or ‘Fire’), Marçal nuances the binary division into ‘reason’ and ‘madness.’ In the poem, *folla* (madness), appears right next to *seny* (‘reason’, ‘common sense’), the two words almost mixed, their meanings blurred: ‘Ales de mort muda de cants vençuda | Folla de seny, folla cassandra clamo | Cega vident contra el veixell atàvic| Sang a les veles,’<sup>297</sup> (‘Wings of the mute death of songs, defeated | mad from sense, mad Cassandra, I call | Blind visionary, against the atavistic ship | Blood on the sails.’) Marçal’s Cassandra is ‘folla de seny’<sup>298</sup> (‘driven to madness by sense.’) The white sails are stained with blood, as if to break the dichotomy between the “pure” white and the “promiscuous” red – another binary division imposed on women. Cassandra, blind and visionary, is evoked in ‘Xera’ to symbolize the voice of a prophet, a woman deemed delirious and therefore unheard, unheeded. No matter what she says, she will be regarded as “irrational” and disregarded, unbelieved — unless, of course, she remains silent and succumbs to the patriarchal, “rational” norms of (non-)expression that include, for instance, the radical abolition of the material aspects of her body.

Women’s self-determination in the European canon is often represented as insane or monstrous, as I argued in the previous sections. For Marçal,

No és cap casualitat que molt sovint —com passa en el relat mitològic grec [...] de Perseu que mata a Medusa— les llegendes que ritualitzen aquesta lluita contra el mal presenten el monstre com un personatge femení.<sup>299</sup>

<sup>297</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 32.

<sup>298</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 32.

<sup>299</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac*, p. 37.

[This is why it is not surprising that very often —as is the case of the Greek myth of Perseus who kills the Medusa— the legends that ritualize the fight against evil represent the monster as a female character.]

Medusa, the symbol of killing, the untamed, the irrational, the feminine, has become, for many women writers, a symbol of repressed creativity. Sylvia Plath, one of Marçal's later inspirations, dedicates her poem 'Medusa' to the monstrous medusa who escapes 'that landspit of stony mouth-plugs, | Eyes rolled by white sticks, | Ears cupping the sea's incoherences | the disorderly, untamed force of the sea,'<sup>300</sup> prompting the reader to surrender to the 'sea's incoherences,' to untamed forces, even to insanity. In grabbing the pen, the writer not only seeks to transcend the limits of the gendered language, she also aspires to cross the boundaries of language to attain the unspeakable, the disorganized, the hybrid. Writing thus connotes the danger of acknowledging and embracing insanity – the laugh of the Medusa, described by Hélène Cixous<sup>301</sup> as a defiant, empowering gesture, dangerously approaching a non-linguistic blabber, a laugh of madness, liberation, but also despair, like the laugh of the insane Bertha, locked in an attic in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.<sup>302</sup>

If Marçal represents feminine "irrationality" or madness, it is perhaps to nuance those concepts as both cultural constructs and the result of a lived experience of oppression. For Marçal, not only are 'insanity,' irrationality, and non-communication imposed on women, women writers are also actively incited to fly off the handle by the gaslighting effects<sup>303</sup> of such patriarchal stereotypes. In 'Meditações sobre la fúria,'<sup>304</sup> ('Meditations about Fury') Marçal

<sup>300</sup> Sylvia Plath, 'Medusa,' *Ariel* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010) p. 38.

<sup>301</sup> See: Hélène Cixous, Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, 'The Laugh of the Medusa,' *Signs* Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1976), pp. 875-893. <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173239?seq=1>> [accessed 20 August 2020]

<sup>302</sup> For a thorough analysis of patriarchal stereotypes in Victorian literature, see: Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

<sup>303</sup> Rebecca Solnit wittingly 'translates' the phenomenon of collective 'gaslighting' into contemporary American politics: 'Gaslighting is a collective cultural phenomenon too, and it makes cultures feel crazy the way it does individual victims. That we are supposed to pretend that mass shootings and the epidemic gun death rate have nothing to do with the availability of guns is insane. That there is nothing to the Trump team's dozens of covert contacts with Russian regime figures during the campaign and the Mueller investigation is a baseless witch hunt is a counterfactual agenda being pushed by sheer aggression from the Republicans and right-wing media and some supposedly left-wing darlings. [...] The thing to remember here about an assault on truth is that it's an assault.' Rebecca Solnit, 'They Think They Can Bully the Truth. On Trump, Putin, Weinstein, and Their Neverending Lies.' <<https://lithub.com/rebecca-solnit-they-think-they-can-bully-the-truth/>> [Accessed 18 July 2019]

<sup>304</sup> In the essay, Marçal makes interesting connections between *Jane Eyre*, Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Emily Dickinson's and Anna Dodas' poetry, in an attempt to respond the question of whether the fury that results from systemic



remembers Virginia Woolf's famous 'A Room of One's Own,'<sup>305</sup> especially the image of Woolf furiously scribbling on a sheet of paper, unable to write, after she discovered that most of the well-known, influential, self-satisfied writers that she found in the library were men. Marçal admits to feeling furious too at the thought of the systematic exclusion of women from the realm of *logos*.<sup>306</sup> Fury, for Marçal, becomes the opposite of rational, normative, lyrical *decorum*:

una fúria com aquesta és incapaç de parlar; només té dos camins: el silenci o el so inarticulat, l'esgarip, el xiscle. Un llenguatge bàrbar i inintel·ligible com aquell cant a-líric que els grecs atribuïen a les Fúries, que ells anomenaven Erinies, antagonistes i enemigues d'Apol·lo, el deu portador de la líra.<sup>307</sup>

[a fury like this is incapable of speaking; it only has two ways: the silence or the unarticulated sound, a shriek, a squawk. A barbarous language, unintelligible like that anti-lyrical singing that the Greeks attributed to the Furies, which they called Erinyes, antagonists and enemies of Apollo, the god who carried the lyre.]

Marçal is aware of the cultural baggage behind concepts such as madness or reason. *Seny*, a symbolically charged word, enjoys a special place in the Catalan history of thought, of which perhaps the most (in)famous example is Eugeni d'Ors. In 'La filosofia del seny: entre Ferrater Mora i Vicens Vives,'<sup>308</sup> Oriol Ponsatí-Murlà compares the evolution of *seny* and *rauxa* in the work of Eugeni d'Ors, Josep Ferrater i Mora i Vincent i Vivies, focusing especially on D'Ors' *La ben plantada* (1911), *Les formes de la vida catalana* ('The forms of the Catalan life', 1944) written by Ferrater i Mora in exile in Chile, and *Notícia de Catalunya* ('News from Catalonia'), an influential text written by Vicens i Vives published ten years later (1954), in Francoist Spain. All three authors, for all their differences, deploy *seny* as one of the collective "personality traits" of Catalan cultural history, and seek consolation in evoking such supposedly "inherently Catalan" virtues. For all authors, *seny* appears as a desired, positive trait. For Ferrater, it is a collective trait that needs to be cherished and preserved, together with measure and the sense of irony. For Vives, it is opposed to rampant *rauxa* ('madness', 'wildness,' 'fury,' 'fire.') For both writers, the cultivation of the desirable "collective personality" traits, of measure, balance, and

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oppression can be artistically productive. As a counterpart to the Erinies, Marçal mentions the goddess Athena as an incarnation of silence and detachment from the body —she was born in a suit of armour—.

<sup>305</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'A Room of One's Own' (London: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>306</sup> For an expanded analysis of the importance of fury in women's writing, see: Maria-Mercè Marçal, 'Meditacions sobre la fúria,' in *Sota el signe del drac*, pp. 133-153.

<sup>307</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac*, p. 137.

<sup>308</sup> Oriol Ponsatí i Murlà, 'Les formes de la vida catalana de Ferrater Mora. Una visió des de l'exili,' *L'Avenç*, Issue 305 (September 2005).

common sense are necessary for Catalonia to be able to thrive as a nation. Unlike Ferrater and Vives, D'Ors, represented *seny* as a desirable value specifically for a woman. According to Epps,

Eugeni d'Ors's ideal Catalan muse, la Teresa, *La ben plantada*, from the work of the same name (1911), is born in the symbolically laden Asuncion, Paraguay. But if d'Ors noucentista ideal comes from America, it, or she, comes from Catalans in America, Catalans from Catalonia, born and bred there: 'Alegria! Tot, tot s'ha salvat. La Raça és, en l'admirable criatura, purissima.' D'Ors's celebration of racial purity is as secure as it is small minded: Catalonia must be beyond Catalonia so as to return, reinvigorated, as Catalonia. The morphology of this civic folktale turns too on a departure and a return: d'Ors invents a prodigal daughter who, in her goings and comings, saves rather than spends and who settles down to make a "proper" Catalan home.<sup>309</sup>

D'Ors' ideas of *Noucentisme* are embodied in the figure of *La ben plantada* (1911), 'the decent' or, literally, 'the well-rooted' woman, specifically the gendered, racialized, figure of Teresa, the exemplary Catalan woman whom d'Ors describes as follows:

Sabem per què importa tant a la Raça; tant, que ella es dóna, a la quieta, amb cadascun dels seus gestos, amb cadascuna de les seves dites lacòniques, una lliçó de catalanitat eterna, de tradició, de patriotisme mediterrani, d'esperit clàssic.<sup>310</sup>

[Now we know why Race is so important in her, so much so that it reveals itself, tacitly, in each and every gesture she makes, each laconic remark is an eternal lesson of being Catalan, of the tradition, the Mediterranean patriotism, the classical spirit.]

D'Ors' *La ben plantada* offers a masculinist understanding of 'Classical' order and perfection – the image of an ideal, Catalan woman who symbolizes the nation, from qualities such as her robust body, fit for giving birth, her modesty, and her racial 'purity.' Her body is described as if it was made to please the observers and adhere to current trends: 'el tronc, doncs, generós i del tot hel·lènic, hauria estat excessiu en 1909, però s'escau d'acord plenament amb les modes blanques, folgades, clàssiques, harmoniosíssimes de 1911'<sup>311</sup> ('The trunk, then, generous and entirely Hellenic, would have been excessive in 1909, but it suits the soft, loose, classic and highly harmonious fashion of 1911 perfectly.') Other than to satisfy someone else's aesthetic preferences, the body of Teresa serves to breed children: 'En espera de les maternals abundàncies, aquest bust és ara tot consagrat a la suprema delícia de la respiració.'<sup>312</sup> ('While

<sup>309</sup> Epps, 'Before Postnationalism,' p. 139.

<sup>310</sup> Eugeni D'Ors, *La Ben Plantada* (Barcelona: Selecta, 1958), pp. 108-109.

<sup>311</sup> D'Ors, *La Ben Plantada*, p. 13.

<sup>312</sup> D'Ors, *La Ben Plantada*, p. 14.

waiting for the maternal abundancies, this bust was entirely devoted to the supreme delight of breathing.’) It does not cross the narrator’s mind to think of Teresa’s body as a source of sexual pleasure for her. She dresses modestly, because as the narrator explains, to dress ‘a la manera flonja’ (‘in loose garments’) is typical of ‘intelligent women,’ as opposed to the less intelligent who opt for ‘l’ordre de vestir estret, minvat, travat i cenyit a ultrança’<sup>313</sup> (‘tight, shrunk, restraining and small garments.’) The perfect Catalan woman, perhaps even “woman as such” is not, thus, irrational, rather, she is made to accept an imposed “rationality” that allows the narrator to decide what she should “rightfully” do with her body. This is not the kind of rationality that Marçal would be interested in, in spite of the fact that the relationship between *rauxa* and *seny* in poetry (focusing especially on *rauxa*, *folla*, *passió*) constitutes one of her interests. In an essay dedicated to Ausiàs March, medieval poet invested in the aesthetics of courtly love and an important reference for Marçal, she analyzes the imagery of passionate love which, in March, characterizes the masculine writing ‘I,’ tormented by ‘foll pensament’ (‘mad thinking’) and ‘poc seny’ (‘little reason’), as opposed to the sensible attitude of the woman he loves and who is described as ‘plena de seny.’<sup>314</sup> While sexual desire or passion is generally regarded by March as a sinful attribute, this conviction does not only refer to women, but to both genders. Marçal adopted some of March’s tropes in her writing, she was very much interested in the convention of courtly love in poetry, which she often transformed, for example to express an obsessive infatuation. (In Chapter Five, I discuss the importance of passionate love in Marçal’s writing in more detail.)

The poet was of course aware of the fact that she, too, was often reduced to the stereotypes of a ‘naïve’ or ‘irrational’ woman who only writes about personal experience. In a letter to Jean-Paul Goujon, she complained about Juan Goytisolo’s insistence on calling her work ‘fresh and spontaneous.’<sup>315</sup> However, as I have claimed above, Marçal’s response to the monolithic masculinization of the Catalan sphere of *logos* is to mix references traditionally considered as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine.’ Even though it is understandable to expect of Marçal, a left-wing, feminist poet, not to reproduce the models of community or family in which the woman is

<sup>313</sup> D’Ors, *La Ben Plantada*, p. 15.

<sup>314</sup> See: Maria-Mercè Marçal, ‘Sobre Ausiàs March,’ in *Sota el signe del drac* (2020), pp. 118-125.

<sup>315</sup> ‘Estimat Jean-Paul, ahir vaig pensar en tu quan, durant una vetllada poètica al metro [...] em van presentar amb la frase de Goytisolo —que amenaça, malauradament, de fer fortuna— sobre la meua poesia “fresca y espontánea.”’ [‘Dear Jean-Paul, yesterday I thought about you when, during a poetry-reading event at an underground station [...] I was introduced with a phrase by Goytisolo —which, unfortunately, threatens to become famous— that calls my poetry “fresh and spontaneous.”’] Marçal, *El senyal de la pèrdua*, p. 170.

relegated to the realm of the passive, the natural, the irrational, the private, I see Marçal's feminism as contrary to any poetics of imposition. To be a woman, in Marçal's writing, means to include different kinds of women (also of conservative or spiritual interests), each of whom may choose her own definition of womanhood in accordance with her beliefs.

### **Strangers In The Country of the Poet: Women, National Spirit, and Matter**

Unlike Marçal, Fiedorczuk has expressed a need for a more radical rupture with the personal experience in the literary representation of women.<sup>316</sup> The most recent instance of this conviction is Fiedorczuk's comment on her Facebook page, in which she thanks poet Barbara Klicka for talking about 'wykluczeniu z przestrzeni logosu' ('[women's] exclusion from the realm of logos'). In her repost of Klicka's interview, Fiedorczuk quotes the following fragment of Klicka's interview: 'marzy mi się teraz raczej dowartościowanie pracy kobiecego intelektu, a nie opisów kobiecych doświadczeń. Wydaje mi się, że tych ostatnich wcale nie brakuje w literaturze ostatnich lat, tylko... jakby trochę – co z tego? Zbyt łatwo się je egzotyzuje i ujednoliciarwia.' ('Currently I dream of some more acknowledgement for the work of the feminine intellect, rather than more descriptions of women's experiences. The latter, I think, are quite present in the literature of the recent years, but... I mean, so what? They are too easily exoticized and homogenized.')<sup>317</sup> In expressing her approval of Klicka's words, Fiedorczuk seems to suggest an unavoidable chasm between the realm of 'experience' and 'intellectual work' of women. This is not to say that 'experience' and 'intellect,' 'body' and 'reason' are seen as mutually exclusive opposites. In her critical texts, Fiedorczuk has pointed to the pervasive nature-culture, body-reason or body-soul binaries as closely related to sexism. In this section, I focus on Fiedorczuk's reexamination of those elements of the Polish poetic tradition that made it possible to exclude women as intellectuals and poets.

For Fiedorczuk, 'European poetry, as the domain of genius, has been dominated by men, reserving for women, at best, the roles of muses.'<sup>318</sup> As the poet claims,

<sup>316</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, Facebook post, 20 September 2020.

<<https://www.facebook.com/julia.fiedorczuk/posts/10220292651320547>> [accessed 27 September 2020]

<sup>317</sup> Barbara Klicka, Klaudia Muca, 'Ruch, nie zastyganie: Z Barbarą Klicką rozmawia Klaudia Muca,' in *Fragile* (September 2012) <[https://fragile.net.pl/ruch-nie-zastyganie-z-barbara-klicka-rozmawia-klaudia-muca/?fbclid=IwAR02u7\\_0SHL7RUXMVRvDnylq1qZDG3MJX59FTawx80CQUWkx5r7fXn9WQ7A](https://fragile.net.pl/ruch-nie-zastyganie-z-barbara-klicka-rozmawia-klaudia-muca/?fbclid=IwAR02u7_0SHL7RUXMVRvDnylq1qZDG3MJX59FTawx80CQUWkx5r7fXn9WQ7A)> [Accessed 27 September 2020]

<sup>318</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, 'Strangers in the Country of the Poet,' p. 1.

the identification of genius with male virility [...] in the Polish tradition is combined with an exceptional status of poets as the creators and keepers of national identity or, alternatively, as rebels/revolutionaries. [...] Genius, national bard, witness, revolutionary: all these are traditionally masculine roles.<sup>319</sup>

The Polish literary canon seen as a repository of community models postulates, thus, tends to represent relationships meaningful for the nation (between poets, soldiers, politicians) as relationships between men, relegating women to the role of sexual objects, care-givers, tools for reproduction. Women are also used as a protective shield for the community of men against potential 'suspicions' of homoeroticism.<sup>320</sup> As Janion observes,

Polska kultura narodowa jest kulturą wybitnie męską. W jej obrazie na plan pierwszy wysuwają się związki homospołeczne, więzi męskiego braterstwa i przyjaźni. Do idealnych modeli tego typu związków, opiewanych w rozmaitego rodzaju przekazach [...], należą między innymi, w kulturze staropolskiej, szlacheccy 'panowie-bracia', hufce rycerskie, a w kulturze nowożytnej [...] walczący o niepodległość ojczyzny spiskowcy dziewiętnastowieczni.]<sup>321</sup>

[Polish national culture is exceptionally masculine. In its image, the homosocial relationships are highlighted as ties of male fraternity and friendship. The ideal models of such relationships, described by different sources [...], include, among others, the noble 'masters-brothers' and troops of knights in the pre-modern culture, and in modern culture [...] the nineteenth century conspirators who fought for their fatherland's independence.]

Within the Polish tradition, the two poets that Fiedorczuk especially points to as figures of national bards are Mickiewicz and Miłosz, as propagators of 'Polish exceptionalism: linking Polish identity to a sense of trauma and martyrdom, demanding not only that Polish poetry be the witness to these things but also that the poetics of this witnessing conform to certain standardized norms.'<sup>322</sup> Fiedorczuk comments on Miłosz's reading of poet Anna Świrszczyńska, whose work he admired, translated into English and actively promoted. Świrszczyńska started writing before World War II, then worked as a nurse in the Uprising in Warsaw. Her most acclaimed poetry books were published during the Communist period: *Jestem baba* (1972; 'All woman') and

<sup>319</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'Strangers in the Country of the Poet.'

<sup>320</sup> Maria Janion writes more broadly on homosociality and compulsory homophobia in nationalist discourses, proving that nationalism tends to work similarly, whether in the myths of Polish soldiers and war heroes, in German Nazi Youth or in contemporary, right-wing Polish hooligans. It follows the community model according to which all important friendships and conflicts occur among men and which, absurdly enough, at the same time condemns homosexual love. To avoid the suspicion of it, nationalist ideologies utilize the figure of the Mother. (Janion, pp. 267-274.)

<sup>321</sup> Janion, p. 261.

<sup>322</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'Strangers in the Country of the Poet,' p. 50.

*Budowałam barykadę* (1974; Eng. 'Building the Barricade', 1979). Miłosz translated some of these poems and published a book on Świrszczyńska, titled *Jakiegoż to gościa mieliśmy* ('What a Guest We Had'). Fiedorczuk underlines the patriarchal prejudice that inflected Miłosz's reading of Świrszczyńska:

Miłosz attempted to come to terms with her unchecked celebration of mature female eroticism, a very direct treatment of the body and a particular sense of intimacy, of a different sort than the one practiced by confessional poets. But in praising Świrszczyńska's achievement, Miłosz always made sure to underscore that hers was not, really, "feminine poetry."<sup>323</sup>

At the same time, Miłosz calls Świrszczyńska a 'charming creature,' an 'elf,' and compares her to Telimena—a ridiculed feminine character from Mickiewicz's epic poem *Pan Tadeusz*, a mature woman desperate to find a husband, manipulative, promiscuous, impoverished and wrinkled, the opposite of the virginal, naive and angelical Zosia—. As Fiedorczuk observes,

It is symptomatic that Miłosz, when writing about Anna Świrszczyńska, the only woman poet whom he truly respected and whose work he eagerly promoted both in Poland and in the US, used Telimena, a literary character created by a male poet, as a point of reference. Świrszczyńska was for Miłosz a "liberated Telimena." This literary filter, the filter of the male poetic gaze, was indispensable for Miłosz in order to come to terms with Świrszczyńska's unruly femininity.<sup>324</sup>

At some point Miłosz confesses that he would actually like to 'defend' Świrszczyńska as a legitimate member of the canon, and that he is 'almost in love with her,' which, quite understandably, Fiedorczuk criticizes and mocks.<sup>325</sup> Miłosz was not a scornful critic of Świrszczyńska, he was a scornful critic of feminism, which he did not understand and perceived as a monolithic, simplified narrative 'imported' from the West.<sup>326</sup> (The most fundamental conflict of feminism, according to Miłosz, is the women's unstoppable urge to become mothers, an assumed discourse that he does not question or explore any further.<sup>327</sup>) Świrszczyńska's feminism and agnosticism, her dedication to question the dichotomies between the 'bodily' and the 'metaphysical,' stood in a deep opposition to the understanding of Polish community in which women are doomed to endure violence – according to Miłosz, the Slavic culture excels in

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<sup>323</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'Strangers in the Country of the Poet,' pp. 47-48.

<sup>324</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'Strangers in the Country of the Poet,' p. 47.

<sup>325</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'Strangers in the Country of the Poet,' p. 148.

<sup>326</sup> Czesław Miłosz, *Jakiegoż to gościa mieliśmy: O Annie Świrszczyńskiej* (Kraków: Znak, 1996), p. 78.

<sup>327</sup> Miłosz, p. 90.

despising women.<sup>328</sup> In order to ‘defend’ her, Miłosz attempted to ‘translate’ Świrszczyńska’s work, labelling it ‘metaphysical.’ But Świrszczyńska was no ‘metaphysical poet,’ as Fiedorczuk observes. On the contrary, she questioned the spiritual, patriotic narratives that legitimized human sacrifice; she spoke of ill soldiers, dying soldiers, injured bodies of the soldiers who just wanted to live and be young. ‘Ci co wydali pierwszy rozkaz do walki | niech policzą teraz nasze trupy’<sup>329</sup> (‘Those who gave the first order to fight | let them now count corpses,’ in Piotr Florczyk’s translation),<sup>330</sup> she wrote about the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, thirty years after it happened. Indeed, by simplifying Świrszczyńska’s thought, Miłosz, who was himself a stark critic of the Uprising, actually upholds the spiritualizing discourses that made it possible.

Fiedorczuk’s opposition to Miłosz’s reading of Świrszczyńska as a ‘metaphysical poet’ is part of a wider debate, which concerns, firstly, the exclusion of women from the realm of rationality, and, secondly, the unhelpfulness of dividing our perception of the world into two separate realms: the “metaphysical” and the “material.” In another essay, Fiedorczuk interprets Świrszczyńska’s poem “Female and Male.” The original poem, in Piotr Florczyk’s translation, reads:

You impregnated me and I gave birth to pearls.  
Authentic. Look.  
You’re staring, astonished,  
scared by this wealth,  
which you do not understand.  
Pebble, you who triggered the avalanche, look at the shine  
of her panting splendor.  
Listen to the heavy hymn  
of falling.  
Pebble without eyes and ears.<sup>331</sup>

In the original poem, it is clear that the writing ‘I,’ who is a woman (she says ‘I gave birth,’ *urodziłam*, and the verb is in first person singular, feminine) addresses a male interlocutor (the verb *zapłodniłeś*, ‘you impregnated,’ is in second person singular, masculine, and the past

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<sup>328</sup> Miłosz, p. 79.

<sup>329</sup> Bohdan Piętko, ‘Powstanie Warszawskie w poezji Anny Świrszczyńskiej,’ *Myśl Polska*, Issue 35-36 (26.09-2.09.2018) <<http://www.mysl-polska.pl/1661>> [accessed 21 August 2020]

<sup>330</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, ‘An Introduction to Anna Świrszczyńska’s Warsaw Uprising Poems,’ in *Przekrój* (August 2018) <<https://przekroj.pl/en/articles/feuilletons/an-introduction-to-anna-swirszczynskas-warsaw-uprising-poems>> [accessed 1 July 2021]

<sup>331</sup> Anna Świrszczyńska, ‘Two Poems,’ *Przekrój*, trans. by Piotr Florczyk (January 2020) <<https://przekroj.pl/en/literature/two-poems-anna-swirszczynska>> [accessed 11 July 2021]

participle ‘astonished,’ *zdziwiony*, is masculine too). The writing ‘I,’ a woman who just gave birth, is speaking to a man about how life is created. The man, who started the process, does not understand how it happened. It is a conversation between a ‘male’ and a ‘female,’ two human animals, who are just coming to understand that life, which to them feels precious, is physical, rather than beyond physical (meta-physical). Although they both participated in creating a new, unique being, one that nature will never repeat, they are but pebbles, eyeless and earless, they do not own the process. In Fiedorczuk’s interpretation, “Female and Male” shows Świrszczyńska as a spiritual, but not a metaphysical author:

“Female and Male” [...] is about that, birthing. To my mind it is a deeply spiritual poem, but Świrszczyńska’s spirituality is earthly and fleshy, not metaphysical. Female and male – in the original *samica* and *samiec* – suggest animals rather than human beings, but of course humans, too, are animals. An animal-like, creaturely union of the sexes triggers an avalanche – what else could that avalanche be but life itself? Life “without eyes and ears”, both fragile and powerful, is the source of genius: female and male and, in the end, in a sexed being’s wildest dream, androgynous. Complete.<sup>332</sup>

The image of androgynous completeness, most probably inferred from the debates on translating the book of Genesis, will interest both Marçal and Fiedorczuk (I devote more space to exploring it in Chapter Four. Here, however, I would like to briefly discuss Fiedorczuk’s views on the relationships between patriarchy and anthropocentrism.) As Fiedorczuk observes, while trying to ‘redeem’ Świrszczyńska, Miłosz actually contributes to her status as a poetic outsider:

Tellingly, the title of Miłosz’s essay on Świrszczyńska, *Jakiegoż to gościa mieliśmy* (‘What a guest we had’), emphasizes her outsider status. A guest is someone who does not properly belong to this world, a stranger. One is tempted to ask, who are the “we” who had this guest? Men? Poets? The heirs of Mickiewicz?<sup>333</sup>

Of course, it should be noted that Miłosz’s essay is written after Świrszczyńska’s death with the intention to render a homage to the poet by whose death he was deeply moved; the expression of ‘guest’ could also refer to the fleeting nature of human life, describing us humans as mere guests on planet Earth. However, Fiedorczuk’s reading is based on a more thorough reading of womanhood in Miłosz, in whose poetry the symbolic figure of guest could perhaps be extended to include not only women, but also non-human beings.

<sup>332</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, ‘An Introduction to Anna Świrszczyńska’s Two Poems,’ *Przekrój* (January 2020) <<https://przekroj.pl/en/articles/feuilletons/an-introduction-to-anna-swirszczynskas-two-poems-julia-fiedo>> [accessed 11 February 2020]

<sup>333</sup> Fiedorczuk, ‘Strangers in the Country of the Poet,’ p. 48.



Fiedorczuk devotes an entire chapter in her book *‘Cyborg w ogrodzie’* to the representation of Nature as Woman, also in Polish poetry. She criticizes feminized, abstract and monolithic figurations of nature, for example in Miłosz’s poem *‘Do Natury’* (*‘To Nature,’*) in which *‘Nature’* is feminine and *‘man’* masculine, while the dialogue between the man and Nature is metaphorized as a reproach of a disappointed lover, man, towards Nature, woman. In the poem, Miłosz juxtaposes a vision of humans as superior beings to the futility of an abstract idea of *‘Nature:’* *‘Tylko on, człowiek, pojmuję, współczuje | Poddany i niepoddany kamiennemu prawu. | Świadomość człowieka na przekór tobie, Naturo’*<sup>334</sup> (*‘Only him, the man, feels compassion | submitted and not submitted to the laws of stone. | The man’s consciousness contradicts you, Nature.’*) Fiedorczuk describes such representation of *‘Nature’* as

nie odnosi się do rzeczywistych bytów, [...] nietrudno [w *‘Naturze’*] rozpoznać elementy judeochrześcijańskiej teologii. Przede wszystkim wiersz ustanawia opozycję binarną pomiędzy tym, co ludzkie, a tym co naturalne. Człowiek, byt teologiczny (i teleologiczny), jest radykalnie oddzielony od natury (pozbawionej znaczenia i historii, “jednodniowej”) i z perspektywy tego oddzielenia przeżywa różne uczucia. [...] Żal odczuwany przez poetę w stosunku do Natury jest prostą reakcją na dokonaną uprzednio idealizację.<sup>335</sup>

[unrelated to any real beings. [*‘Nature’*] is a metaphysical construct in which it is not too hard to recognize elements of Judeo-Christian theology. Firstly, the poem establishes a binary opposition between that which is human and that which is natural. The human being, a theological (and teleological) being is radically separated from nature (devoid of history and meaning, futile) and from the perspective of this disconnection the man experiences different feelings. [...] The reproach of the poet, directed at Nature, is a simple reaction to his idealization of it.]

But to describe the non-human world, as well as women, as mere examples of an abstract idea (Nature or Woman) allows to exploit them, to treat them as tools for men/humans to achieve higher goals. In the age of Anthropocene and of multiple human rights crises, more helpful imageries are urgently needed. Drawing on the post-humanist and eco-feminist thought of Donna Haraway, Carolyn Merchant and Naomi Klein, Fiedorczuk points to the intrinsic incongruity of symbolic fictions such as “Nature” or “Woman.” In *Cyborg w Ogrodzie* (*‘Cyborg in the garden,’* 2015, henceforth *Cyborg*), Fiedorczuk argues against fantasies of a pure, binary division between form and matter, nature and culture, the reasonable and the irrational, reflected in romanticized

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<sup>334</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, *Cyborg w ogrodzie* (Gdansk: Katedra, 2015), p. 46.

<sup>335</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Cyborg*, pp. 47-48.

visions of Nature. The poet quotes Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (1782), whose narrator, representative of sentimentalism, eagerly embraces the quietness of streams and ponds and rejects other, "impure" dimensions of the natural, such as insects or the physicality of human bodies.<sup>336</sup> The Garden of Eden, for Fiedorczuk, is "Nature" without nature, a strictly narcissistic psychological projection that results from the need for order, security, comfort, and satiety.<sup>337</sup> To illustrate what the Garden of Eden could look like, Fiedorczuk describes a walk in a shopping center, where artificial plants and fountains represent the idea of 'nature,' while images of attractive women, not more 'natural' than plastic plants, encourage shoppers to continue acquiring goods that promise to attain the image of perfect femininity. Like women's beauty, the idea of "natural beauty" needs to be symmetrical, nature needs to *appear* "natural" (innocent, virginal, innocuous, pure), but also "cultivated." Fiedorczuk is not especially fond of the word 'nature' in reference to the natural world. She explains it as follows:

Piszę „Natura”, wielką literą i w cudzysłowie, ponieważ sztuczne kwiaty, sztuczne drzewa i fontanny nie mają wiele wspólnego z naturą będącą przedmiotem nauk przyrodniczych (w tym ekologii), są jednak bez wątpienia emblematami pewnej idei, konstrukcji metafizycznej (twardszej niż stal), określanej tym właśnie uroczystym mianem. „Natura” jest fantazmatem i jako taka stanowi przedmiot uwielbienia albo nienawiści.<sup>338</sup>

[I am writing "Nature," capitalized and in quotation marks, because artificial flowers, artificial trees and fountains have little to do with nature understood as the object of natural sciences (including ecology). But they certainly are emblematic of a certain idea, a metaphysical construct (harder than steel), which is often denominated by this solemn name. "Nature" is a fantasy and as such it constitutes the object of admiration or hate.]

In her book, Fiedorczuk meticulously describes different kinds of ecofeminist summaries of anthropocentric patriarchy, from Val Plumwood's objection to 'normative dualisms,'<sup>339</sup> through Karen Warren's 'conceptual framework' that sustains different kinds of domination<sup>340</sup> to Kate Soper's classification of various patriarchal figurations of nature, from nature as a set of natural

<sup>336</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Cyborg*, pp. 144–153.

<sup>337</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Cyborg*, pp. 146–147.

<sup>338</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Cyborg*, p. 147.

<sup>339</sup> See: Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>340</sup> See: Karen J. Warren, 'The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism,' *The Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, ed. Michael E. Zimmerman (Engelwood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1993)

laws and processes to representing women's bodies as landscape,<sup>341</sup> among many others. The chapter on the foundations for a collaboration between ecology and feminism contains a vast amount of voices, mostly of Anglophone critics, summarized, translated and interpreted for the Polish reader, but it also provides ideas to re-elaborate the commonly employed imagery regarding women and non-human world. Fiedorczuk describes the two principal symbolic clusters of ecofeminist thought that she engages with as 'goddess' and 'cyborgs.' The principal representative of the so-called 'goddess feminism,' spiritual or even esoteric would be Riane Eisler,<sup>342</sup> who alludes to the myth of a paradise lost, painting an image of a world in which people lived united with 'nature.' This Fiedorczuk deems such theories antiscientific; she also sees Eisler's vision as only proclaiming a certain vision of femininity. Indeed, Eisler invites her readers to

ponownego odkrycia intuicyjnej mądrości tamtych czasów, waloryzującej kobiecość i stwórczą siłę życia. Ekofeminizm boginniczny jest jednym z wariantów "powrotu do natury," a zatem – paradoksalnie – opowieści o upadku.

[rediscover the intuitive wisdom of the olden days, which valued femininity and the creative force of life. The goddess ecofeminism is one of the variants of "returning to nature," and so – paradoxically – it is the story of the fall.]<sup>343</sup>

As Fiedorczuk rightfully observes, those sets of beliefs, professed also by other ecofeminist thinkers, risk a universalizing gaze towards women:

Duchowość ekofeministyczna, zwłaszcza w swoich najbardziej entuzjastycznych „boginniczych” wariantach, ryzykuje błąd esencjalizmu, odwołując się do uniwersalnej kobiecości, często utożsamianej z rozrodczością, a także z opiekuńczością i współczuciem. Autorki takie jak Sharon Doubiago czy Charlene Spretnak postulują wywyższenie ciała i natury względem abstrakcyjnego intelektu i kultury, umacniając w

<sup>341</sup> See: Kate Soper, *What is Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

<sup>342</sup> See: Riane Eisler, 'The Gaia Tradition and The Partnership Future: An Ecofeminist Manifesto,' in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed. Irene Diamond, Gloria Feman Orenstein (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990).

<sup>343</sup> A similar observation is sustained by Slavoj Žižek, who writes that feminism (without any specific distinction) is the story of the fall, which repeats the myth contained in the book of Genesis; it also creates a discursive framework that both demarcates and limits feminist discourse. In other words, Žižek claims that for feminists, patriarchy becomes the reference according to which women should define themselves. See: Slavoj Žižek, *The plague of fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997). While Žižek generalizes about feminism, Fiedorczuk refers to specific feminist thinkers she does not agree with and provides alternative ecofeminist references that she finds more helpful.

ten sposób dualizm zachodniego myślenia i ugruntowując stereotyp kobiety jako tej, która należy bardziej do sfery materii niż do sfery ducha.<sup>344</sup>

[Ecofeminist spirituality, especially in its most enthusiastic, 'goddess variants,' risks the error of essentialism, as it refers to a universal femininity, often associated with fertility, compassion, and care. Authors such as Sharon Doubiago or Charlene Spretnak postulate elevating the body and nature over abstract intellect and culture, thus reinforcing the dualism of Western thinking and supporting the stereotype of the woman as the one who belongs more to the realm of matter than to the realm of spirit.]

While 'goddess ecofeminists' encourage readers to embrace the private, the intimate, and the natural, Donna Haraway postulates letting go of the fantasy of paradise-like nature, untouched by human influence or technology. As Haraway contends, 'By the late twentieth century, our time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in that, we are cyborgs.'<sup>345</sup> The controversies around goddess ecofeminism, when transferred to the realm of literature, very much resemble the critique of Marçal's imagery as representative of the feminism of difference, but there is a fundamental difference. Fiedorczuk does not say that women writers should avoid nature-related images or that they should not represent any kind of spirituality so as not to appear essentialist in their views on womanhood. While she is visibly inspired and partially agrees with Donna Haraway's vision of the new, machine-dependent humans as cyborgs, she does not treat the posthumanist thought as a necessary element of any ecofeminist writing, nor does she proclaim a radical rupture with spirituality and extra-linguistic or intuitive perception. This could be illustrated by an interview that Fiedorczuk conducted with the American poet Brenda Hillman. In the interview, Hillman makes the following, somewhat humorous remark:

knowing the primacy and importance of language doesn't mean you can't acknowledge there is experience that is not linguistic. [...] One of my most admired writers is William Blake, who ascribed to spiritual and folkloric presences and also made up his own combination. It's not as if because you like blue you can't also like green.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Cyborg*, p. 172.

<sup>345</sup> Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,' in: Donna Haraway, *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis : Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 7.

<sup>346</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, Brenda Hillman, 'All of the bees in the hive are having an imagination (Interview with Brenda Hillman),' the *Ecopoetics* internet blog <<http://ekopoetyka.com/2017/12/30/post-na-blogu-2-2-2-3-2/>> [accessed 17 September 2019]

Fiedorczuk agrees with Hillman and suggests that human beings need to start imagining literary communication differently, and in ways that both dig deep into and soar beyond the human. She says:

The theme of the imagination fascinates me. You write about the imagination as something that is material, natural. Once again, it cuts through these fundamental dichotomies – matter/ideas, body/mind, things/words.<sup>347</sup>

Cutting through dichotomies, as well as depicting specificity rather than abstract, fantasmatic imaginings of femininity and Nature, are fundamental in Fiedorczuk's literature. The Polish author often speaks of the environmental crisis as a 'crisis of imagination,' i.e. the impossibility of thinking of and picturing the world in ecological terms. In one of her lectures, Fiedorczuk postulates ecopoetics as an 'attempt to respond to ecological crisis.'<sup>348</sup> One of the way to redefine imagination, for Fiedorczuk, is to redefine language and communication in such a way that one can embrace areas that are not necessarily symbolic or, in this context, referential. Fiedorczuk and Hillman mention lichens, which they both see as analogous to metaphors and similes, in as much as lichens are comprised of two different animals connected to form a new, living entity that looks like a plant. They also discuss the ability of bees to detect ultraviolet rays, an aspect of perception and communication in which bees are more advanced than humans.<sup>349</sup> The poets' understanding of the human and non-human likeness resonates with Haraway's conviction that

Language, tool use, social behavior, mental events, nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal. [...] Movements for animal rights are not irrational denials of human uniqueness; they are a clear-sighted recognition of connection across the discredited breach of nature and culture.<sup>350</sup>

Like Marçal, whom we could perhaps consider as an 'ecofeminist' *avant la lettre*, Fiedorczuk acknowledges the links between patriarchy and anthropocentrism and proclaims the need for a (deliberate and clearly expressed) deconstruction of the nature-culture dichotomy as a starting point not only for ecofeminism, but also for making literature and language more welcoming, more homely, to different kinds of beings. There is yet another aspect of the relationship between

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'What Does Poetry Have to do with Ecology? An Introduction to Ecopoetics (excerpt)' <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGEf57Re6Eg>> [accessed 20 August 2020]

<sup>349</sup> Fiedorczuk, Hillman, 'All of the bees.'

<sup>350</sup> Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto,' p. 10.

Polish nationalism and feelings of oppression that I have not attended to in the previous chapter. The victimizing visions of Poland, in order to operate, to have emotional effects on readers, are often based on violent figurations of suffering women. In her literature, Fiedorczuk dedicates a significant amount of space to those female characters who do not fit into the national imagery of womanhood, especially to migrant, underaged or otherwise vulnerable women. In the next section, I explore their stories.

### **‘Death Caught Red-Handed’: Rape Myths, Migration, Survival**

According to Janion, woman functioned in Romantic narratives of the nation as the victim par excellence, represented as a raped and ravished virgin or a crucified body. Janion explores Romantic rhetoric, which deployed highly gendered metaphors both to acknowledge the ‘death’ of Poland and, at the same time, to imagine the nation’s revival and resurrection. Thus, the comparison between Polonia (Poland personified as the body of a woman who was tortured, raped and killed) and Christ came about.<sup>351</sup> In Romantic art and literature, the raped and abused woman became Poland itself and her pain was eerily erotic. As Janion observes,

Fantazmatyczne ciało Polonii przedstawiano jako poniżane, hańbione, bite i dręczone. Mogło to podniecać do nienawiści i zemsty na brutalnych żołdackich sprawcach nieszczęść, ale mogło też, jak wiadomo, budzić fascynację erotyczną.<sup>352</sup>

[The fantasmatic body of Polonia was humiliated, disgraced, battered and tortured. It could call for hatred and revenge on the brutal, military perpetrators, but it could also, as we all know, stimulate erotic fascination.]

The body of Polonia, defined by the canons of beauty and symbolism of ‘purity’ and ‘chastity,’ and ‘whiteness’ was aesthetically pleasing, erotically enticing. Only a white woman could represent Poland and its emblem: the white eagle, symbolic of purity. Not only in Poland, but also overseas, the Romantics attempted to elicit empathy towards Poland through metaphors of ‘dishonored,’ feminine innocence. To quote Janion again:

Ary Scheffer<sup>353</sup> w znanej ‘Polonii’ z 1831 roku przedstawił kozackiego jeźdźcę brutalnie

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<sup>351</sup> Maria Janion explains in more detail the figure of Polonia and the importance of the narratives of rape, abuse and assassination of female bodies in the narratives of the suffering Polish nation in the chapter ‘Polonia powielona’ (Janion, p. 258-299).

<sup>352</sup> Janion, p. 283.

<sup>353</sup> Ary Scheffer, ‘Polonia,’ (Paris, 1831) <<https://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/pl/katalog/780963>> [accessed 12 July 2021]

tratujuącego podwójne zwłoki: na ciele zabitego orła rozciągnięta, obnażona do połowy, leżąca na wznak kobieta, której pierś depcze koń, a pika kozacka, godząc w dolne partie ciała, ma ją zaraz przebić — spenetrować. [...] Ciemny najeźdźca u Ary Scheffera trątuje — gwałci lśniących białą kobietę i orła.<sup>354</sup>

[Ary Scheffer in the well-known [painting] ‘Polonia’ from year 1831 represented a Cossack horseman brutally ravishing a double corpse: extended on the body of a murdered eagle there laid a woman, on her back, naked to the waist, her breast trodden by the horse, while the Cossack’s pike, aimed at the lower parts of her body, is about to perforate — penetrate her. [...] The dark invader in Ary Scheffer stampedes and rapes the eagle and woman, both shining with whiteness.]

No man could so perfectly represent the victimized Poland, no body of color could incarnate its presumed innocence, chastity and virtue so convincingly. The Cossack —the racialized ‘savage’— plays the part of the villain, of the uncultured, ‘barbarian’ Orient of Europe. It also metaphorically justifies the wars and attacks by the Poles towards the orientalized Ukrainians, Cossacks, Rusyns, and Tatars, amongst others.)<sup>355</sup> In her texts, Fiedorczuk complicates the topic of national belonging, touching upon such topics as mixed ethnic origins and migration.

The image of the white, ‘pure’ woman-as-Poland, threatened with rape can also be found in Sienkiewicz’s bestsellers which, while lamenting the fate of kidnapped, tortured women, only focus on depicting communities of men. What is more, the abovementioned, patriotic narratives of the ‘pure’ and ‘innocent’ Poland, battered and raped by the oppressors, legitimize and smooth out the images of sexual assault which become a mainstream metaphor. In Fiedorczuk’s own prose, violence against women, rather than a metaphor, becomes a visceral depiction of the material effects of trauma exposure. Fiedorczuk rewrites several popular myths of the European canon that are based on metaphors of violence, especially rape, proving that the stories can be used to talk about different things, from artistic representation to the partitions of Poland, without flattening or obliterating the conversation on the effects of violence.

Fiedorczuk’s novel *Nieważkość* (‘Zero-Gravity’ 2015, henceforth *Nieważkość*), features a version of a biblical story of Susanna and the Elders. In the Bible, Susanna was a woman watched in secret by two elderly men who threatened they would accuse her of adultery and have her condemned to death if she does not agree to be raped by them. Susanna ‘chooses’ to die and her decision is rewarded by God – she is taken to court and saved by a man named Daniel, who convinces the judges of her innocence by finding the gaps in the testimony of the abusers.

<sup>354</sup> Janion, pp. 282-283.

<sup>355</sup> Janion, pp. 163-242.

Fiedorczuk's contemporary Zuzanna is a small-town, teenage girl who just moved to Warsaw; she is offered drawing classes by an elderly professor, a friend of her father's. Zuzanna starts attending the classes that soon turn into abuse. The visits to the professor's apartment are depicted as scattered images, as if Zuzanna could only access memories of the events as dispersed fragments. In one of the flash-backs, the girl is entering the professor's apartment; it is dark and she is cold. She follows his voice, clings to it, as if stripped of agency or words of her own. She is told to undress. It is suggested she does not know what the encounter will consist of, nor does she really consent to it; she feels 'zimno i potwornie smutno,'<sup>356</sup> ('cold and terribly sad') when the voice orders her to lie down in a beam of light. Zuzanna feels her body foreign to herself: 'W końcu nie przebywała już w sobie, tylko gdzieś w okolicach żarówki, patrzyła na siebie z góry i oceniała ten występ, raczej dość żaloszny,'<sup>357</sup> ('In the end she was not within her body anymore, but somewhere next to the light bulb, she was watching herself from above, judging her own performance, which was rather pathetic.') The out-of-body experience as a result of abuse is a recurrent motif in Fiedorczuk's prose, often related to the fragmentation of speech, vision and perception; it is often metaphorized as a lack of ground beneath one's feet, a sensation that will haunt Zuzanna throughout her life.

The girl asks the professor to talk to her, most likely to create a defense-narrative, to be able to disguise the abuse she is enduring as love. The old professor starts reciting a poem that calms Zuzanna down, that returns her to her body. The poem is a story of the mystical love of God – George Herbert's 'Love III.'<sup>358</sup> Through the act of reading the poem, the professor symbolically assumes the role of God, and through poetry the violence he is perpetrating is discursively redeemed from a sin she never committed. Zuzanna, an aspiring painter, becomes identified with the sinner from Herbert's poem; she cannot believe she is worthy of "love": 'I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear, | I cannot look on thee.'<sup>359</sup> But Love, incarnated by the professor, shows the sinner-Zuzanna 'mercy': 'Love took my hand, and smiling did reply, | Who made the eyes but I? [...] You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat: | So I did sit and eat.'<sup>360</sup> In the novel, the professor uses the authority of God, who made the human eyes and therefore is

<sup>356</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość* (Warszawa: Marginesy, 2015), p. 144.

<sup>357</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość*, pp. 144-145.

<sup>358</sup> In the novel, the poem is quoted in Stanisław Barańczak's translation; at the end of the book Fiedorczuk explains the origins of her quotes and mentions the authors and translators whose work she had used.

<sup>359</sup> George Herbert, 'Love III' < <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44367/love-iii> > [accessed 17 August 2020]

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.



entitled to control the “sinner”’s feelings and perceptions, to justify rape. Sexual abuse, in the novel, is not presented as an anecdote, similar to the Biblical Susanna and the elders, but it is seen from the point of view of the survivor, whose experience of the resulting trauma is integrated into the form of the novel.

Zuzanna’s memories are provided in scattered fragments. After the childhood flashbacks, we read about Zuzanna as an adult, on a business trip to Athens. When in the Greek capital, Zuzanna-the-adult contemplates the harmonious proportions of an Ancient Greek statue, and her reflections on art are mixed with more memories of her interactions with the art professor. The description of the statue, written in Ancient Greek (it says ‘thea’ or ‘goddess’), considered the ‘universal’ language of Classical values, allows the readers to make a connection between the abusive relationship she once had and questions of artistic representation.

Zuzanna remembers that, as a child, she was fascinated with stones and pebbles, and refused to produce any form of art except for realistic representations of those rocks. One evening, when the professor happened to be in a bad mood, he asked why Zuzanna only drew stones, to which she answered:

‘Bo wydaje mi się, że naprawdę istnieją. – Co takiego? – profesor nie krył już irytacji. – A cóż to za pretensjonalna bzdura? – Wydaje mi się – wyjaśniła Zu – że jeśli coś w ogóle istnieje, to najpierw istnieje kamień. – Bo co, bo jest twardy? – głos drwił. – Kutas też jest twardy; czemu nie narysujesz kutasa?,’<sup>361</sup>

[‘Because I think that they exist truly.’ ‘What?’ The professor did not hide his irritation anymore. ‘What pretentious nonsense is this?’ ‘I think that if anything exists at all, it is the rock, rather than anything else,’ Zuzanna explained. ‘Why is that now, because it’s hard? A dick’s hard too, why don’t you draw a dick?’]

The professor, who embodies the belief in the artist’s redemptory task that consists in attributing meanings to things, despises realistic depictions. He scorns Zuzanna, suggests that she is not mature as an artist, or as a woman (which she indeed is not; as a high school student, she is also below the legal age of consent). The fragment could also be read in ecopoetic terms, as a display of power of a narcissistic artist, convinced of the autonomy of the work of art and of the superiority of human creation over the creative efforts of other living beings. In order to become a ‘mature’ or perhaps ‘true’ artist, Zuzanna would need to accept the ‘universal’ authority of the professor, which separates the objects of representation —the “natural,” the material— from the

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<sup>361</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość*, p. 156.

authoritarian genius of the artist as God. The professor, thus, would represent the belief that art needs to always attribute metaphysical meanings to objects, while Zuzanna displays curiosity with the specificity of the non-human world in its most mundane elements, such as rocks.

When Zuzanna decides to pay a visit to the professor outside of the usual visiting time, she finds him lying down between the legs of another underaged student. She drops the flowers she was carrying, the romanticized narrative of mystic love shatters into pieces and with it Zuzanna's sense of self. The scene is later portrayed by the professor in what becomes his most acclaimed painting: stone-grey flowers surrounded by scattered body parts, which, according to the critics, represent 'symbol milczenia rzeczy, którą artysta poddaje obróbce i w ten sposób zbawia, wynosząc ponad upadły w swoim biologicznym zdeterminowaniu porządek natury,'<sup>362</sup> ('the silence of objects, which the artist processes and thus redeems, elevating them over the fallen order of nature in its biological determination.') A bitter allusion to the depictions of Woman as Nature, which Fiedorczuk explores in *Cyborg*, is evident here. In Zuzanna's relationship with the professor, Zuzanna becomes the object of his art, just like rocks or flowers, and is dispossessed of interpreting her own experience, which is interpreted by the critics. In the novel, the critics also relate the painting to the myth of Daphne turned into stone – yet another 'universal' romanticization of sexual violence. Only decades later, on her trip to Athens, Zuzanna will meet the biblical Daniel, who in *Nieważkość* is only an anecdotal character. Daniel's role is that of a witness to Zuzanna's transformation as she begins to reclaim the unity of her perception and explores those forms of representation that escape the 'universal' canon; she connects with a group of disabled artists and decides to promote their work. Unlike the Biblical Zuzanna, she is not rescued; she only survives because she starts to make her own decisions, questioning the hegemonic position of 'high art' and relying on her own opinion to determine the kinds of artistic representation she finds interesting.

Another mythical protagonist, Leda, appears in Fiedorczuk's *Bliskie kraje* ('Close lands,' 2016, henceforth *Bliskie kraje*. The book title alludes to internal 'foreigners' or others in one's country, but also to the closeness of the foreign). Leda, the mythological, Aeolian princess, mother of Helen, was raped by Zeus disguised as a swan. Fiedorczuk gives her name to a waitress, bullied by the owner of the restaurant where she works, who later turns out to be attracted to her. The mythological Leda, foreign and yet domesticated, anachronistic and yet

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<sup>362</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość*, p. 157.

contemporary, in Fiedorczuk's story, wears a unisex uniform and works in a fashionable establishment serving organic food. Removed from any cultural specificity, covered by the uniform, she strives to incarnate the utopian, capitalist idea of a genderless, efficient worker, who complies with her duties and expects equal treatment. The manager feels attracted to the girl and fires her because she is indifferent to him; he justifies it with narratives of 'cleanliness' or hygiene: she had dirty nails. ('What do you mean, it's not dirt? Your nails – sacred earth is it? Sacred earth behind your nails? Been digging in the soil? But but but. My dear girl. You can't work here with filthy paws,' he says.)<sup>363</sup> In another story from the same book, Leda —the same person? or do they only share a name?— travels to a Greek island with a female friend for a writing retreat. The two women talk, drink wine, and experience moments of complicity that almost suggest lesbian desire – one of them, the narrator, observes the other lovingly, talks about her laughter, her beauty, about the moment at which their underwear ended up tangled together when they were washing their clothes. But this experience of attraction and friendship on an island, while inevitably evoking the symbology of Lesbos, still connotes certain, well, insularity. When the women set off for a hike and get to the nearest town, Leda feels like dancing, so they look for a bar. The night ends when the local fishermen, usual clients of the bar, begin to harass Leda and start insulting her after she refuses to kiss one of them. The women are forced to escape from the bar —and implicitly from being raped— and hide alongside a highway, where a love affair begins between them.

In Fiedorczuk's prose, the ideals of equal agency, so trustfully embraced, are still conditioned by the threat of violence. It is by juxtaposing the various Ledas that Fiedorczuk initiates a cross-lingual, transnational dialogue – in this case a dialogue on the patterns of violence. The motif of princess Leda and the swan travels across different times, countries and literary traditions, crossing borders and throwing into question a single, language-specific belonging of Leda.

As strangers (or guests) in the country of the Poet or the Artist, women in Fiedorczuk's texts suffer symbolic orphanhood (even though, unlike Marçal, Fiedorczuk does not explicitly use family metaphors to refer to the exclusion of women from the realm of *logos*); they are exposed to an increased risk of vulnerability. The threat and actual trauma of rape, very prominent in all Fiedorczuk's narrative texts, often appears tied to migration, errancy, homelessness,

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<sup>363</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, 'Medulla,' trans. by Anna Zaranko, *Przekrój* (November 2019) <<https://przekroj.pl/en/literature/medulla-julia-fiedorczuk>> [accessed 14 February 2020]

uprootedness. In a different story from *Nieważkość*, an unnamed immigrant of Ukrainian origin is fostered by a Polish man much older than her, in his home. The book opens with the scene of the man raping the girl and legitimizing his aggression using discourses of womanhood and orphanancy:

‘Nie chcę’, powiedziała, napierając rękami na klatkę piersiową mężczyzny żeby go od siebie odsunąć. [...] Dziewczyna widziała kropelki potu na jego czole i krótkie, twarde czarne włoski na brodzie, blisko, bardzo blisko swojej twarzy. ‘Nie chcę, nie chcę, nie chcę’, powtórzyła. ‘A wczoraj chciałaś’ [...]. ‘Czego ty chcesz?’, zapytał. ‘O co ci chodzi? Co ty byś beze mnie zrobiła, sieroto?’<sup>364</sup>

[‘I don’t want to,’ she said, pressing on the man’s chest to push him away. [...] The girl could see drops of sweat on his forehead and short, harsh, black hairs on his chin, close, very close to her face. ‘I don’t want it, I don’t want it, I don’t want it,’ she repeated. ‘You wanted it yesterday’ [...]. ‘What do you want?’, he asked. ‘What is this about? What would you do without me, orphan?’]

The nameless man calls the nameless girl an ‘orphan.’ In Polish, to call somebody an orphan, ‘sierota,’ a feminine noun with no masculine equivalent, means to call them a loser, failure, incapable of taking care of themselves. The narration follows the young girl’s perspective: we see the head of the man, we know the exact details of his physiognomy as her mind, in an attempt to cope, detaches from what is happening and focuses on her surroundings. She notes the patterns on her dress, on the blanket. After her protests go unheard, the girl ceases to speak:

Sierota milczała. [...] Z rozpiętego rozporka wystawał wciąż jeszcze nabrzmiały członek. Dziewczyna wygładzała sukienkę. Zieloną sukienkę w białe groszki. ‘To się chociaż rozbierz’, poprosił w końcu. ‘Chociaż tyle jesteś mi winna’. [...] Rozczochrane ciemne włosy częściowo zasłaniały jej twarz. ‘Dzikusko’, powiedział chropowatym głosem [...]. ‘Obróć się’, zażądał. Usłuchała. W popołudniowym letnim świetle jej skóra miała różowawy odcień chudej szynki. [...] ‘Bogini’, wyszeptał, a potem ukląkł przed nią i łapczywie przylgnął do niej ustami. [...] Delikatnie wbiła paznokcie w skórę jego głowy. Potem trochę mocniej. Potem z całej siły. Jęknął, wyprostował się, objął ją w pasie i uniósł do góry — była lekka jak piórko. Położył ją na tapczanie i nie zostawiając jej czasu na następny ruch, przygwoździł ją sobą do koca w czarno-czerwonej kratce.<sup>365</sup>

[The orphan remained silent. [...] From the opening of his unzipped fly his member was sticking out, still swollen. The girl smoothened the fabric of her dress. Green, with white dots on it. ‘At least take your clothes off,’ he finally asked. ‘You owe me that much.’ [...] Her dark, tousled hair partially covered her face. ‘Savage girl,’ he said in a rough voice.

<sup>364</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość* (Warszawa: Marginesy, 2015), p. 9.

<sup>365</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość*, pp. 10-11.

[...] ‘Turn around,’ he demanded. She obeyed. In the afternoon light of summer sun her skin had the pinkish color of lean ham. [...] ‘Goddess,’ he whispered, then kneeled before her and greedily sucked on her. [...] She lightly dug her nails into his scalp. Then a little more strongly. Then with all her strength. The man groaned, stood up, wrapped his arms around her waist and lifted her off the floor — she was lighter than a feather. He placed her on a sofa and, without leaving her time for a next move, he pinned her down to a black-and-red checked blanket.]

When the woman loses her voice, she becomes meat in the eyes of the man. She is lean ham. She nervously plays with the fabric of her green, dotted dress, reminiscent of a meadow, of land or soil yet to be sown and ploughed. Her body belongs to the man, who claims his power over her flesh by the way he speaks. Silent, speechless, the girl becomes an exoticized savage, a ‘goddess,’ a statue perhaps, as she is ‘worshipped,’ looked on by the man in a false gesture of reverence. Of course, being voiceless in the face of sexual assault, for Fiedorczuk, does not mean actual voicelessness – in *Nieważkość*, the woman does speak, does object, but her voice does not ‘do things,’ it does not work as an efficient performative to stop the abuse.

Either as a spiritual or an inanimate being, the girl is discursively expelled from the human realm, stripped of her clothes, of her language, of her singularity. As food or land, she is there to satisfy the man’s needs, like a piece of meat, she will be “eaten.” The man lifts her up; she is very light. No gravity, no homeland; no boundaries to protect her from the crushing weight of the man’s body on top of hers. Indeed, the motif of feeling light or rootless, of ‘zero-gravity,’ which gives the title to Fiedorczuk’s novel, appears on numerous occasions in the context of immigrants and homeless protagonists, thus pointing to the excluding nature of those narratives of the nation that rely on the idealization of ‘pure’ origin and on ties to the land, especially by owning property.

The topics of migration and belonging, not only in the context of gender, are very prominent in Fiedorczuk’s last novel, *Pod słońcem*, which I mention in the previous chapter. Along with metaphors of supranational cooperation, conveyed by Esperanto and the Communist ideology, there are many characters in the novel who migrate (often against their will), but also who are attached, if not to a nation, then to the land on which they settle. The novel begins with the memories of Misza, the Esperanto student, lying on his death bed and remembering his youth, which is linked to with a story of wandering. Misza sees himself as a young boy, he is loved for the first time, but he decides to leave the woman whom he was living with, Zofia, and set off for a journey of self-discovery, a voluntary one. He then travels with his wife, Miła (in Polish ‘miła’

means ‘nice’), to settle in another town, and then travels again to meet with his lover whom he met thanks to Esperanto, and who lives in Sarajevo. The two maintain a correspondence for many years after he comes back to Miła and their children. Misza’s journeys of self-discovery are contrasted with other travelling characters who do not travel by choice: his father Piotr, travelling to the USSR in search of a job and almost dying on his way back, the other inhabitants of the village forced to travel as the borders were moving. Those other journeys, in the novel, are often linked to a promise of survival.

Most of the novel is set in Drohiczyn, a Polish town that now belongs to Siemiatycze County, Podlaskie Voivodeship. In the nineteenth century, the town, although it remained in the same place, changed its national identification multiple times: it was divided between the Habsburg empire and the Kingdom of Prussia after the first partition of Poland, then between the Duchy of Warsaw and Russian Empire, resulting in the town’s division into a Polish and a Ruthenian district. When Poland was invaded by the Nazi troops, the town was seized by the Wehrmacht, and then occupied by the Soviet Union, after which massive detentions of its inhabitants, who were sent to Siberia, took place. In the novel, the events of the past are retained by the landscape and by the collective memory of the town’s inhabitants. In a scene that appears to be set after World War II, two women are ice skating on the river Bug that, in nineteenth century, divided the Polish and the Ruthenian sides. One of the girls, Zofia, is skating fast, ‘po prawej stronie mając skarpe i miasto, po lewej zaś niższy, dziki brzeg, zwany ruskim brzegiem, chociaż w wojnę stali tam Niemcy’<sup>366</sup> (‘with the city and the hill on the right side and on the left, a lower, more savage shore, called the Ruthenian shore, even though during the war the Germans were standing there.’) Zofia remembers some girls she saw at the market square as a child, and of whom she knows they are dead. Sometimes their wandering spirits visit her in her house, she can see them burning. Miła, Misza’s wife, also remembers a Jewish girl, Ryfka, who escaped from a train that was transporting her and her parents (to a concentration camp, as the reader may guess) and who was hiding in Miła’s family house when Miła was a little girl. One day Ryfka leaves, she is fifteen, the war has ended and Miła hopes that Ryfka will travel far away, where she will not hide.

An important travelling character is Jewdokia, the wife of Ziemak. Mr Ziemak did not ever leave Drohiczyn, unlike Jewdokia, who had escaped with the others that

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<sup>366</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Pod słońcem*, p. 20.

Niemca się przestraszyli albo ktoś im kazał. Bo tak też bywało. Przyjeżdżał taki, niby z frontu, chodził po domach i opowiadał, co też Niemiec robi, kiedy już jakąś wieś zdobędzie, jakie okropieństwa popełni na kobietach, dzieciach i starcach. Uwierzyli i pognali – w głąb Rosji, co ich miała przyjąć jak matka.<sup>367</sup>

[Got scared of the Germans or someone made them. Because it happened sometimes. Someone would come, presumably from the war zone, and start walking from house to house, telling everyone what the Germans do when they conquer a village, what horrible things they do to women, children, and the elderly. They believed and off they went – into Russia, which was to receive them like a mother.]

Jewdokia travelled too, she was fifteen at the time, and where she was fleeing from a village on the Ruthenian side of the river. After four years she came back with her brother; her parents had died on the way and the village was now Polish. ‘Ludzie akurat wtedy z Rosji wracali, ci, co wcześniej przed Niemcem uciekli, główni ruscy, prawosławni, ale polscy też. Nie z Polski uciekali, ale do Polski wracali’<sup>368</sup> (‘Right then people were coming back from Russia, the people who had been fleeing from the Germans earlier, mostly Ruthenian, orthodox, but there were Poles too. They did not flee from Poland, but to Poland they were now coming back.’) But Jewdokia’s house was taken by another family while they were away, and she was too tired to fight for it. Her brother died soon after, and Ziemak, who was Polish, decided to marry her and build a house where they could live. But for the people from the village she was always a stranger:

Jeśli pies zbłądzi nocą w lesie, od razu zagryzą go wilki, bo pies to dla wilków ani obcy, ani swój. I z ludźmi bywa tak samo. Obcych nie lubią, ale najbardziej takich, którzy są zbyt bliscy, za bardzo podobni, właściwie jak swoi. Tamci, co zajęli dom za rzeką rozpowiadali potem, że Jewdokia jest czarownica, że ma złe oczy, że potrafi rzucić urok i że dlatego z całej rodziny nikt nie przeżył [...].<sup>369</sup>

[If a dog gets lost in a forest at night, the wolves will kill it immediately, because a dog, for wolves, is neither a stranger nor one of them. With people it can be similar sometimes. They do not like strangers, but especially those who are too close, too similar, almost familiar. Those who occupied the house on the other side of the river were telling at the time that Jewdokia was a witch, that she had bad eyes, that she can cast a spell and that is because no one from her family survived [...]]

It is telling that in the novel human behaviors are often compared to other, non-human animals.

Jewdokia is one of the characters most attached to the non-human world, she seems to embrace

<sup>367</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Pod słońcem*, p. 206.

<sup>368</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Pod słońcem*, p. 205.

<sup>369</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Pod słońcem*, pp. 208-209.

the label of a ‘witch.’ She communicates with animals, with the forest, the river, and also with the dead. After some time, the villagers start to call her every time someone is dying, so that she can take that person ‘to the other side.’ It is by embracing her uprootedness, her otherness, that Jewdokia, now Mrs Ziemak, can find her place among the Polish villagers, and survive.

After many years in the village, Jewdokia also dies, and her husband does not know how to tell her that. She dreams about dying as if it was another journey, as if to die she needed to let go of her roots. After the death of Jewdokia or Ziemakowa, all women gather together in front of the deceased woman’s house, under a lime tree. The tree becomes a monument of sorts, in that it holds the memory of the dead woman – some village women even seek the woman’s presence in the tree. Unlike a traditional tombstone, the tree changes constantly; it follows the rhythm of the seasons that affects the lives of all the village people. The tree, thus, symbolizes change but also rootedness, stability. Perhaps it also refers to the dynamics of literary representation, between life and death, the fixed and the moving. Instead of a text and the coldness of a tombstone, the tree is mutable, and perishable, as if suggesting that symbolic presence can also be preserved in a flexible form, which remains in contact with life.

A similar reflection on the impossibility of ‘preserving’ a living being through fixing it is present in Fiedorczuk’s work. In her poem ‘Survival’<sup>370</sup> (the original title of this poem is in English), Fiedorczuk portrays a woman with a child in a burning house:

Wszystko już się stało  
ogień we włosach kiedy runął dom  
z żywym dzieckiem na rękach stałam w oknie  
byłam migawką w telewizyjnym szale  
ciepły kłębuszek strachu (...) który krzyczy połyka deszcz  
fotogenicznie przyłapany na gorącej śmierci  
w doskonałym dniu lata  
łagodna postać światła między akacjami  
kiedy liczymy na więcej i więcej  
życia kiedy bliskich  
nosimy w portfelu.

[Everything’s happened already | fire in the hair when the house crumbled | with a child still alive I stood in the window | I was but a snapshot in the TV madness | warm little ball of fear | (...) which screams swallows rain | photogenic, death caught red-handed | on a perfect summer day | a gentle form of light among the acacias | when we ask for more and more | life when we carry | our loved ones in our wallet]

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<sup>370</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, *Planeta rzeczy zagubionych* (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2006), p. 27.



The image of the woman who ‘survives,’ turned into a picture, is also the image of dying. The woman’s picture lingers on, captured and unchanged, even though ‘everything has happened already’, and the woman, the referent of the image and of the words that attempt to convey it, is no longer there. The ‘(...)’ sign in the middle of the description of the image of the woman, which belongs to the original, suggests a number of things that could have been said about her, that will never be said. Her death was ‘photogenic’, for photographable, a form made of light, but what was photographed was a fleeting moment, the moment of her passing.<sup>371</sup> As a fixed image, then, the woman as a living being ceases to exist, much like the pictures of ‘our loved ones’ that ‘we’ carry in our wallets, and which only capture a certain moment of their existence. Fiedorczuk’s language, which puts into words the image of the living-dying woman, becomes itself an image of ‘death caught red-handed’ as it paints an icon of impossibility: the inability to capture or reflect ‘life’ without killing it.

The reference to the woman’s photogenic death also brings to mind Rebecca Solnit’s semi-autobiographical book *Recollections of My Nonexistence: A Memoir*, in which the author reflects on the difficulties of finding one’s own voice in a world in which women’s words are not as efficient as men’s in ‘doing things.’ Solnit quotes Edgar Allan Poe who was to say that the death of a beautiful woman was the most poetical topic to write about. Solnit responds that

He must not have imagined it from the perspective of women who prefer to live. I was trying not to be the subject of someone else’s poetry and not to get killed. I was trying to find a poetics of my own with no maps [...]. To find your own poetry in which your survival rather than your defeat is celebrated, perhaps to find your own voice to insist upon that [...] is work that many and perhaps most young women have to do.<sup>372</sup>

Marçal’s and Fiedorczuk’s feminist readings of the nation are very much concerned with survival. Marçal’s deployment of terms such as ‘abolished language’ and ‘feminine orphanhood,’ indicates the existence of multiple links between the minoritization of Catalan and the relative absence of women, queer individuals, and non-human perspectives in the European literary canon. Fiedorczuk explores the links between, on the one hand, the Polish hero and martyr narratives, paramount in imagining the Polish nation and literature, and, on the other hand, implicit violence and exclusion of women from the realm of *logos*. Marçal, for her part,

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<sup>371</sup> As Roland Barthes beautifully argues in his *Camera lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), death is perhaps most acutely represented through the images of life captured on a photograph.

<sup>372</sup> Rebecca Solnit *Recollections of My Nonexistence: A Memoir* (New York: Viking, 2020), e-book, p. 4.

demystifies and attempts to reclaim symbols traditionally used to exclude women from poetry, such as motherhood, corporeality, irrationality, and magic. In the Polish canonical discourses of poets as heroes and witnesses of foreign invasions, there rarely is space to acknowledge the gendered nature of violence, especially sexual violence; Fiedorczuk counters this tendency in her prose. In an attempt to propose an alternative version of language and national community, Fiedorczuk points to the importance of seeing one's homeland not only as a symbolic and linguistic entity, but as an interconnected whole, which includes different kinds of human histories, but also landscape, air, water, animals and plants. In Chapters Three, Four, and Five, I take a closer look not only at Fiedorczuk's and Marçal's professed beliefs regarding womanhood, diversity, language, and nation, but on the way in which they use multiple languages in their writing to complicate the relationships between languages and nations. Thus, Chapters Three and Four are devoted to translation, while Chapter Five is dedicated to language mixing and border-crossing.

## Chapter Three: Trans-Lingual Affinities? Translations, Refractions, Melody, and Science

Perquè qualsevol canvi important implica dolor.

— Maria-Mercè Marçal (2004)

There is a new venue for theory, necessarily impure, where it emerges in and as the very event of cultural translation. This is not the displacement of theory by historicism [...] that exposes the contingent limits of its more generalizable claims. It is, rather, the emergence of theory at the site where cultural horizons meet [...].

—Judith Butler (1990)

The opinions on Marçal's translations vary. Some scholars, such as Caterina Riba<sup>373</sup> or Natasha Tanna,<sup>374</sup> argue that Marçal's rendering of other poets' work, openly and admittedly fragmentary and based on literary re-appropriation, contributes to creating a trans-national, feminist genealogy. Others, for instance Dolors Udina, underline the fact that there are significant changes between the originals and the translations. Udina relates those changes to the fact that Marçal did not perceive herself as a professional translator. Although Marçal does not focus on translation theory in her work, some of the poet's translation techniques, as well as her views on translation, may be retrieved and reconstructed from her essays, recorded conversations, and translation practices.

When it comes to Fiedorczuk, no substantial critical study is available on her work as a translator. Unlike Marçal, Fiedorczuk dedicates a significant amount of space in her essays to translation criticism, however, she does not seem to privilege any overarching theory of translation. Fiedorczuk is a prolific translator, an academic professor and researcher. In her academic work, devoted to American Modernism and to ecocriticism, she often relies on English texts, which she translates and at the same time reflects on the process of translation; she also uses translations published by others, always carefully acknowledging the translator's work. If there are common traits in Marçal's and Fiedorczuk's attitudes towards translation, it is because each of the authors translates in accordance with her particular vision of hospitality and

<sup>373</sup> Caterina Riba Sanmartí, 'Maria-Mercè Marçal: Tradició/traducció/creació', in *Estudis Romànics* (Institut d'Estudis Catalans), vol 37 (2015), pp. 471-481.

<sup>374</sup> See: Tanna, *Queer Genealogies in Transnational Barcelona*.

openness. For Marçal, this means embracing influence: translation is a dialogue between the author and the translator, but also between texts, ideas and convictions that had influenced both the author and the translator or critic in the past. Embracing influence also means listening rather than speaking first, it means valuing exchange and cooperation more than originality at any cost, all of which are important elements in a feminist debate. For Fiedorczuk, hospitality is an ecopoetic imperative – to write is to make language more homely, to transform the symbolic space so that it becomes more open to non-humans. That is why, as a translator and translation critic, Fiedorczuk focuses most of all on rendering the translated author's relationships with the non-human world.

In the present chapter, my focus is not on determining the 'value' or 'accuracy' of Marçal's or Fiedorczuk's work as translators, even though I do refer to other scholars who address this issue, whenever appropriate. Instead, I focus my analysis on those aspects of Marçal's and Fiedorczuk's translations that are relevant to their vision of writing.<sup>375</sup> The chapter is devoted to reviewing various voices of translation scholars in dialogue with Fiedorczuk and Marçal. In Chapter Four, which is linked to this chapter, I examine the ways in which the two writers link different translation dilemmas to other domains, such as music, human relationships, or ecology. As I hope to demonstrate, translation for Fiedorczuk and Marçal is not only a complex and intellectually relevant field of academic and literary research, but also an alluring metaphor that enable discussion about current global issues such as feminism, literary representation, and the environmental crisis.

### **Translation, Refraction, Ecopoetics**

Fiedorczuk dedicates much space in her writing to depicting, be it poetically, scientifically, or spiritually, the human relationships with the non-human world. In their book *Ekopoetyka / Ecopoética / Ecopoetics*, Fiedorczuk and Beltrán speak of a need to renew language in order to transform readers' imagination of the human and non-human cohabitation on Earth. According to Fiedorczuk and Beltrán, working with collective imagination is reminiscent of translation:

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<sup>375</sup> What is more, I do not possess the necessary means to compare the originals and translations exhaustively. Just like Marçal (who translated from Russian), I do not speak Russian, nor do I speak French, which is the second source language of Marçal's translated texts. Whenever I had such an opportunity, I sought advice from Russian and French speakers or resorted to the already existing work of other translation scholars. Nevertheless, I consider these partial and occasional consultations insufficient to produce an original critique of both writers' rendering of the relevant source texts.

Both poetry and science progress by means of new metaphors, both suffer from stale language and dogmas. [...] Translation involves a transfer of meaning between languages. The basic operation of metaphor is the same (the word metaphor comes from the Greek verb *μεταφέρω*, to transfer). Certainly, as Hillman points out, meaning suffers in these processes, but it ‘comes back changed.’<sup>376</sup> Translating, between languages and disciplines, is a crucial aspect of what we would like to think of as the poetics of this work.<sup>377</sup>

The transition between languages or concepts, a transition which always involves a transformation of meaning, is present both in translation and in poetic practice. The “newness” of a cross-lingual poetics does not necessarily imply unintelligibility, but it does invite the readers’ effort to actively participate in the transfer by offering the possibility of comparing various versions of a text. Fiedorczuk’s and Beltrán’s book is written in English, Polish, and Spanish (although, as the authors explain, the presence of German and Yiddish is also prominent), for many reasons.<sup>378</sup> Firstly, as the authors explain, ecocritical thought has its origins in English, which is why Fiedorczuk and Beltrán decided to ‘broaden the scope of ecopoetic considerations by introducing poetry written in Spanish and Polish in keeping with the tendency of ecocriticism to become more international and multicultural.’<sup>379</sup> The second reason is the authors’ respect for language diversity. Language, for Fiedorczuk and Beltrán, is a living organism; it is material as well as symbolic,<sup>380</sup> the authors also see the extinction of languages as linked to the extinction of species.<sup>381</sup> Another reason for the ecopoetic manifesto to use translation is that, in its most fundamental premise —creating a common home for all living beings— ecocriticism must think beyond the specific discourses of each national community; that it is why ecological thought

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<sup>376</sup> Brenda Hillman, ‘Twelve Writings toward a Poetics of Alchemy, Dread, Inconsistency, Betweenness and California Geological Syntax,’ in *American Women Poets in the 21st Century: Where Lyric Meets Language*, ed. Claudia Rankine and Juliana Spahr (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), 276–77. Quoted in: Fiedorczuk, Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka / Eco-poética / Ecopoetics*, pp. 216-217.

<sup>377</sup> Fiedorczuk, Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka / Eco-poética / Ecopoetics*, pp. 216-217.

<sup>378</sup> Fiedorczuk, Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka / Eco-poética / Ecopoetics*, p. 216.

<sup>379</sup> Fiedorczuk, Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka / Eco-poética / Ecopoetics*, p. 216.

<sup>380</sup> For Fiedorczuk and Beltrán, ‘the fact that language is materially connected with the body is rather obvious,’ but the authors also see the ability to use language as a natural ability of humans as a species. For the authors, ‘Language is a natural phenomenon [...]. Human children do not need to go to school in order to learn to speak, they only have to spend time with other individuals of their species, just as lion cubs need to spend time with their parents in order to learn to hunt.’ (Fiedorczuk, Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka / Eco-poética / Ecopoetics*, pp. 247-248.) The comparison to hunting is telling, given that, according to the authors, humans have used symbolic language to oppress each other, as well as to control nature. But it is not exclusive to humans to generate and read meaning or to communicate it, as ‘all biological phenomena can be said to possess a sentience and the ability to read the signs encoded by other entities, and the process of evolution is largely dependent on the activities of interpretation and play.’ (Fiedorczuk, Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka / Eco-poética / Ecopoetics*, p. 250.)

<sup>381</sup> Fiedorczuk, Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka / Eco-poética / Ecopoetics*, pp. 254-295.

needs translation and multilingualism, which in the book is used as a statement on the importance of linguistic diversity. While ecopoetics aims to dialogue with non-human perspectives, it does not mean ‘translating’ the non-human world into the language of art, understood as an autonomous, symbolic entity, unaffected by the surrounding world. According to Fiedorczuk and Beltrán, ‘one of the most fundamental gestures performed by ecological criticism is the contestation of the high modernist idea of the autonomy of a work of art, including a literary work.’<sup>382</sup>

For Fiedorczuk, language as a symbolic system of signs has too often been taken for granted as the only language possible and an excuse for human domination over non-human life. After all, as she and Beltrán write, ‘jesteśmy zwierzętami – to oczywiste – zarazem jednak przychodzimy „po” zwierzętach, korzystając z wykonanej przez nie ewolucyjnej i kulturowej pracy, zamieszkując i modyfikując zbudowane przez nie światy, kontynuując twórcze wysiłki nie ludzi’<sup>383</sup> (‘we are animals, —that’s obvious— but we also come “after” them, we use the evolutionary and cultural work that they undertook, we inhabit and modify the worlds they built and continue the creative efforts of the non-humans.’) But symbolic language is not only specific to humans, nor does the existence of highly specialized, complex systems of signs always facilitate communication.<sup>384</sup> In their article, the author give examples of non-human languages that may indeed be more efficient in organizing collective efforts, precisely because they are not symbolic, for example the chemical communication of bacteria or the sexual language of the bonobos.

Fiedorczuk often includes references to non-human languages in her literature. In the short story ‘Pieśń nad pieśniami’ [‘Song Of Songs’] from *Bliskie kraje*, one of the characters, a student of management who attends ‘philosophy classes for science students’ writes an essay about Chilean avantgarde poet Vicente Huidobro and his cow. She imagines the life of the cow which, as the philosophy professor explained to his students, appears on one of the pictures of Huidobro and his family on a trip they took to Europe. The student imagines that the cow was left in Paris, where she learned French. She already spoke Spanish, which she had learned in Chile, and soon she became famous among humans. Meanwhile, in a small French village, a boy tells his

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<sup>382</sup> Beltrán, Fiedorczuk, *Ekopoetyka / Ecopoética / Ecopoetics*, p. 228.

<sup>383</sup> Gerardo Beltrán, Julia Fiedorczuk, ‘Języki nie ludzi,’ *dwutygodnik.com* (December 2014) <<http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artukul/5632-jezyki-nieludzi.html>> [accessed 11May 2017]

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

grandpa that their cow, who is not famous, can also speak human languages: ‘Rozmawiałem z nią wiele razy, kiedy nikt nie słyszał. Powiedziała, że większość krów mogłaby się nauczyć ludzkiej mowy, ale nie widzą powodu, bo ludzkie języki są nieudane i wywołują wojny’<sup>385</sup> (‘I talked to her many times, when no one could hear us. She said that most cows could learn human language but they see no reason to do so, because human languages are faulty and they cause wars.’)

Ecopoetics, thus, becomes the principal lens through which Fiedorczuk will approach both writing and translation. For example, the poet respectfully disagrees with the translations of William Carlos Williams (1883–1963) penned by Julia Hartwig (1921–2017), a renowned Polish poet and translator from English and French. Fiedorczuk, unlike Hartwig, reads Williams as a sentimentalist, which she considers a positive term. Williams, for Fiedorczuk,

jest sentymentalistą w sensie ścisłym. Ważne są dla niego uczucia i zmysły, nie same w sobie, rzecz jasna, lecz jako środki nawiązania kontaktu ze światem zewnętrznym. W przeciwieństwie do Stevensa, którego emocje krępują, Williams to nie tylko intelekt.<sup>386</sup>

[is a sensu stricto sentimentalist. Feelings and senses are important to him, not only as such, of course, but as a means to communicate with the outside world. Unlike Stevens, who is uncomfortable with emotions, Williams is not just the intellect’.]

Fiedorczuk sees Williams as a ‘poet of simplicity,’ which constitutes the main difficulty in translating his work:

Im dłużej, im intensywniej, im głębiej czytam Williamsa [...], tym dobitniej stwierdzam, że ta przejrzysta jak kryształ, antypoetycka poetyka rzuca czytelnikowi o wiele większe wyzwanie niż niejeden kwiecisty poemat.<sup>387</sup>

[The longer, the more intensely or more profoundly I read Williams [...], the more clearly I see that this anti-poetic poetics, translucent like crystal, poses more challenge to the reader than many florid narrative poems.]

Fiedorczuk admires Williams’ sense of ecopoetic minimalism, which does not seek metaphysical explanations in ‘what simply is.’ The poet sees a certain humility in a non-explanatory or non-ornamented style of representing the non-human world, a humility that she also attributes to and

<sup>385</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje* (Warszawa: Marginesy, 2016), p. 121.

<sup>386</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Złożoność*, p. 40.

<sup>387</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Złożoność*, p. 40.

admires in Marianne Moore.<sup>388</sup> Fiedorczuk disagrees with Hartwig's translations of Williams; for Fiedorczuk, Hartwig 'trochę inaczej odczuwa tę poezję. Jej Williams jest poważniejszy, jakby dociążony. Tłumaczka znajduje w nim pewien rodzaj melancholii'<sup>389</sup> ('feels slightly differently about his poetry. Her Williams is more serious, as if weighted down. The translator finds in his work a certain kind of melancholy.')

Fiedorczuk sees similarities between the transfer that occurs between two languages and the 'translation' of one's perceptions of the world into language; neither of these transfers can ever be exact or unmediated. (This of course is nothing new, but the Polish poet often seems to aim for overcoming the urge to be original rather than pursuing it; she appears to value collaboration and humility much higher than originality.) In the preface to her book of essays on American Modernist poetry,<sup>390</sup> Fiedorczuk applies the metaphor of a prism to convey the tension between notions of clarity, purity or simplicity, and opacity, impurity, complexity in literature:

Pierwszą część tytułu ninejszej książki zaczerpnęłam z wiersza Marianne Moore "W czasach czystego koloru." Jak to często bywa u tej autorki, wiersz bazuje na sprzeczności. Wybrzmiewa w nim tęsknota za tym, co pierwotne i niezłożone, jednocześnie jednak słyhać fascynację nowoczesnością, a zwłaszcza nowoczesną nauką.<sup>391</sup> [...] Moore wyobraża sobie kolor w najczystszej postaci, w mitycznym czasie, kiedy rzeczywistość była całkowicie spójna, nawet jeszcze nie w raju, ale wcześniej, kiedy Adam był sam, czyli przed nastaniem różnicy seksualnej [...]. Zarazem jednak jest to kolor, którego nie można już zobaczyć. Nie można, chyba że... użyje się pryzmatu.<sup>392</sup>

[I borrowed the first part of the title of this book ['Complexity is Not a Crime'] from Marianne Moore's poem 'In the Days of Prismatic Color.' As is often the case with this author, the poem is based on a contradiction. It sounds out a longing for that which is primary and uncomplex, but we can also hear a fascination with modernity, especially with modern science. [...] Moore imagines color in its purest form, in a mythical time, when reality was entirely coherent, not even in paradise, but earlier, when Adam was alone, before the arrival of sexual difference [...]. At the same time, this color cannot be seen anymore. Unless... we use a prism.]

<sup>388</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the poetics of humility in Moore see: Julia Fiedorczuk, "The profession of humility": Marianne Moore's ethical artifice.'

<sup>389</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Złożoność*, p. 44.

<sup>390</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Złożoność*, p. 7.

<sup>391</sup> The fragment that Fiedorczuk quotes is the following: 'not in the days of Adam and Eve but when Adam | was alone; when there was no smoke and color was | fine, not with the refinement of | of early civilization art but by virtue | of its originality, with nothing to modify it but the | mist that went up, obliqueness was a variation | of the perpendicular, plain to see and | to account for'. < <https://genius.com/Marianne-moore-in-the-days-of-prismatic-color-annotated> > [accessed 28 April 2020]

<sup>392</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Złożoność*, p. 7.



Fiedorczuk explains in a footnote that the word ‘Adam’ in the original, Biblical Hebrew, means ‘human,’ most probably deprived of any specific sex or encompassing both normative sexes. It is also etymologically linked to the color red, and perhaps to skin, even soil, as if alluding to the redness of clay.<sup>393</sup> In this account, complexity in human perception relates to sexual difference, a complexity concealed and simplified by the most common interpretations of Genesis (an aspect to which I will return in the next chapter, as it was also addressed by Marçal.) The ‘pure color,’ in Moore, may refer to color-less, ‘white’ light as well as to a fantasy of simple, ‘straightforward’ truths. —purity, clarity, transparency— that I will reflect on throughout this chapter. For Fiedorczuk, the longing for a “self-evident”, pre-scientific simplicity, prior to culture, and hence to processes of gendering and anthropomorphizing, is a utopian and self-contradictory desire. As the poet observes, the colors of light can only be perceived by using the refracting, prismatic tools provided by science and language. In Fiedorczuk’s words:

Po przejściu przez bryłę przezroczystego materiału o co najmniej dwóch równych ścianach ustawionych pod odpowiednim kątem wiązka białego światła rozdziela się na proste, “pryzmatyczne” barwy. Jest to proces jak najbardziej naturalny, ale obserwowanie efektu wizualnego —tęczy— jest możliwe dzięki zastosowaniu narzędzia, czyli (bardzo prostej) technologii. Paradoksalnie zatem, prostota nie jest taka prosta, a w każdym razie – nie jest łatwa. Aby doswiadczyć tego, co pierwotne, trzeba umiejętnie użyć tego, co wtórne, dopracowane, naukowo sprawdzone.<sup>394</sup>

[After passing through a block of transparent material with at least two regular edges set at an appropriate angle, a beam of white light splits into simple, “prismatic” colors. It is an entirely natural process, but the observation of its visual effect —a rainbow— is possible thanks to the use of a tool, a (very simple) technology. Hence, paradoxically, simplicity is not so simple, or at least it is not easy. In order to experience what is primary we need to use skillfully what is secondary, refined, scientifically probed.]

In Fiedorczuk’s interpretation, Moore’s poem portrays language as a tool similar to that of a prism, a technology to ‘translate’ the physical, non-linguistic world.<sup>395</sup> Fiedorczuk’s metaphor of a prism brings to mind Walter Benjamin’s famous image to illustrate the ‘kinship of languages’:

Fragments of a vessel which are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the

<sup>393</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Złożoność*, p. 7.

<sup>394</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Złożoność*, p. 8.

<sup>395</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Złożoność*, p. 8.

translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.<sup>396</sup>

Of course, Benjamin's deeply religious vision of a 'greater language,' the language of truth or of God, a vision perhaps germane to Maragall's 'living word,' served to make a case for a word-for-word literalness. Via a similar metaphorization, Fiedorczuk will argue that both the writers' and the translators' task is to translate as best they can, but also, when necessary, to embrace the limitations to the transfer of meaning or to the literary mimesis.

In terms of the translation techniques, Fiedorczuk's mention of a prism also evokes a vision of translation as a series of refractions or deformations of meaning, inherent to the circulation of literary motifs in a systems approach to literary studies. The term 'refraction' is borrowed from Andre Lefevere, who observes ironically, and rightly, that the debate on the 'quality' of translations may become unconstructive when it is turned into a competition for the sake of competing – when the critic attempts to spot the translator's 'mistakes' just to prove the translator 'wrong' or incompetent, without drawing any conclusions regarding literature as a system and as an institution. For Lefevere, there are two ways in which such a translation critic would typically approach the shifts of meaning that occur between the original and the translation:

either the writer [...] recoils in horror from so many misrepresentations, damns all translations and translators, and advocates reading literature in the original only, as if that were possible. Or he administers himself a few congratulatory pats on the back [...], regrets that even good translators are often caught napping in this way, and suggests that 'we' must train 'better and better' translators if we want to have 'better and better' translations.<sup>397</sup>

Lefevere goes on to suggest an alternative way to grapple with 'deformations of meaning' between the original and the translation:

A writer's work gains exposure and achieves influence mainly through 'misunderstandings and misconceptions', or, to use a more neutral term, refractions. Writers and their work are always understood and conceived against a certain background

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<sup>396</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The task of the translator: An introduction to the translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*', trans. by Harry Zohn, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London/New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 21.

<sup>397</sup> André Lefevere, 'Mother Courage's Cucumbers: Text, system and refraction in a theory of literature', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, Ed. Lawrence Venuti (London/New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 234.

or, if you will, are refracted through a certain spectrum, just as their work itself can refract previous works through a certain spectrum.<sup>398</sup>

Lefevere metaphorizes changes in meanings or “bad translations” as refractions, a term that evokes the change of direction, etymologically a ‘breaking up’ or ‘back,’<sup>399</sup> and that suggests an unavoidable, physical process. Far from idealizing refractions as a deliberate and advisable translation strategy, Lefevere proposes a system understanding of literature and of literature in translation that incorporates some shifts of meaning into the debate, rather than objecting to their existence. Similarly, Fiedorczuk states that ‘kto stara się przetłumaczyć (zrozumieć) tekst, bierze na siebie zadanie noszące znamiona niewykonalności’ (‘whoever attempts to translate (understand) a text, assumes a task which bears signs of impossibility.’)<sup>400</sup> This, to Fiedorczuk, is not a nihilistic statement, nor is it an excuse to assume that, even though translation means including only some of the potential meanings of the original text, those meanings can be chosen freely. Regarding translators’ decisions, Fiedorczuk asks, somewhat impatiently:

Czy trzeba bez końca powtarzać, że nawet jeśli uznamy, iż znaczenie utworu literackiego zawsze pozostanie niedomknięte, to z tego wcale nie wynika, że tekst nie ma znaczenia lub że można mu arbitralnie przypisywać znaczenia absolutnie dowolne?<sup>401</sup>

[Do we have to repeat endlessly that, even if we admit that the meaning of a literary work will always remain partially open, this does not mean that the [original] text has no meaning or that we can arbitrarily assign any meanings we want to it?]

Thus, while acknowledging impossibility, Fiedorczuk also points to the existence of boundaries to refraction: even though a like-for-like translation is impossible, it constitutes a certain horizon of expectations. Refraction also evokes inter-relationality, interconnectedness, a fissure, a deflection, an oblique or perhaps queer interface by which both the original and the translated message are transformed, fractured, as they enter into contact and undergo further alterations.

The argument of imagination as a tool could be taken further to observe that imagination nowadays is hardly the only tool used by translators. Translations rarely occur without the use of not only internet dictionaries, but also databases, internet corpora, search engines, translation memories, the CAT software, not to mention AI-reliant devices such as automatic translators or

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<sup>398</sup> Lefevere, p. 234.

<sup>399</sup> ‘refraction’ in *Etymological Dictionary Online* <<https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=refraction>> [accessed 5 September 2020]

<sup>400</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, ‘Babelskie sprawy’ *Literatura na Świecie*, 5-6/2008, p. 399.

<sup>401</sup> Fiedorczuk, ‘Babelskie sprawy,’ p. 399.

tools to compare, summarize, and automatically generate texts. Today's translators are cyborgs, which is not to say that they were not cyborgs before the arrival of the Internet. As Michael Cronin observes,

In terms of the progression from the phone to the online query, of course, there is no fundamental change in cyborg ontology. The phone is just as much of an electronic networking prosthetic as the internet-enabled computer. Both allow humans to engage in forms of connectivity that would not normally be possible, given human physical limitations.<sup>402</sup>

But the reliance on technology questions the importance of the tool of human imagination, which has its political and environmental consequences. Multilingual individuals, who are not necessarily specialized translators, are still involved in the machine-assisted translators, only that their work is not remunerated. Cronin mentions technologies such as reCAPTCHA that ask users to write what they see to confirm they are not robots, thus helping to transcribe scanned book pages (by 2008 the equivalent of 160 books per day were transcribed free of charge thanks to this technology).<sup>403</sup> AI algorithms use the data of the internet users to learn from them, also free of charge. This of course is not without cost, even though it does lower the cost of services in the globalized world by eliminating the cost of translation. In Cronin's words,

This demonetization of translation, stripping it of its value as an economic activity, makes the activity and its practitioners particularly vulnerable in a world where cash rather than compassion is generally needed to put food on the table. [...] Each time humans are replaced by energy-intensive machines which consume precious resources, the loss in human contact and conviviality in many instances is compounded by the increased pressure on the carrying capacity of the planet.<sup>404</sup>

What is more, algorithmic devices transform the notion of imagination, as the imagery of abstract concepts such as 'beauty' or 'human' may be illustrated in stereotyped ways.<sup>405</sup> The involvement of technology in translation is a growing topic, very present in newer articles

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<sup>402</sup> Michael Cronin, 'Response by Cronin to "Translation and the materialities of communication"' in: *Translation Studies*, 10:1, p. 93.  
<<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14781700.2016.1243287>> [accessed 20 June 2021]

<sup>403</sup> Cronin, p. 94.

<sup>404</sup> Cronin, p. 95.

<sup>405</sup> AI technologies learn from humans and so they reflect human prejudice. This could be easily observed by typing, for example, 'student,' *uczeń* or *uczennica*, or 'nurse,' *pielęgniarz* or *pielęgniarka*, in masculine and feminine into a search engine. In Polish, the feminine forms of those words will render pictures of caricatural, sexy uniforms, while in English, real life pictures of students and nurses of all genders will pop up. Most pictures that show as 'generic' representations of those concepts are of white, cis-gender individuals.

regarding translation studies and ecocriticism. While Fiedorczuk does not (yet) directly engage with it in her reflections on translation, she has studied and continues to study the intersections of science, politics, and poetry, mostly in the context of interdisciplinary dialogues or ‘translations’ between different fields of knowledge. In the next section, I explore the practical workings of refractions in one of Fiedorczuk’s own translation of Elizabeth Alexander’s poems that deal with the origins of scientific racism.

### **Blown Up Beneath My Glass: Refractions That Expand Meaning**

Some of Fiedorczuk’s translations contain interesting refractions, for instance her translation of ‘The Venus Hottentot’ by Elizabeth Alexander.<sup>406</sup> Alexander’s poem makes a reference to the experience of violence as a result of scientific racism: it tells the story of a woman now named Sara or Saartjie Baartman (no record of her original name exists),<sup>407</sup> a South African Khoikhoi<sup>408</sup> woman brought to Denmark, England, and ultimately France against her will, infamously exhibited in London and Paris before her death at twenty five. The images and description of Baartman and other women show that they were largely perceived as non-human.<sup>409</sup> Baartman suffered hunger, abuse, forceful insemination, and extreme poverty, all of which eventually led to her premature death. Georges Cuvier, founder and professor of comparative anatomy at the Museum of Natural History, used Baartman as a scientific “experiment” in his search for the alleged “missing link” between humans and other primates, an idea of fundamental importance to the theory of evolution and also to eugenics and scientific racism.<sup>410</sup> It took over two hundred years for Baartman’s remains to be returned to Africa for burial, a settlement reached after years of conflict between the French and South African governments. The poem by Alexander commemorates the atrocities, disguised as research, that Baartman suffered together with other

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<sup>406</sup> Born in 1962, poet, scholar, teacher, former Chair of the African American Studies Department at Yale University. Fragments of Alexander’s works and bio available here:

<<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/elizabeth-alexander>> [accessed 6 September 2020]

<sup>407</sup> Sadiya Qureshi, ‘Displaying Sara Baartman, the “Hottentot Venus,”’ *Science History Publications*, xlii (2004), p. 233.

<sup>408</sup> ‘Khoekhoe, also spelled Khoikhoi, formerly called Hottentots (pejorative) refers to ‘any member of a people of southern Africa whom the first European explorers found in areas of the hinterland and who now generally live either in European settlements or on official reserves in South Africa or Namibia,’ according to Encyclopaedia Britannica. See: ‘Khoekhoe’ in *Encyclopedia Britannica* <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Khoekhoe>> [accessed 6 September 2020]

<sup>409</sup> Qureshi, ‘Displaying Sara Baartman,’ pp. 241-244.

<sup>410</sup> Qureshi, ‘Displaying Sara Baartman,’ p. 234.

Khoikhoi women. It is translated by Fiedorczuk and published in one of the leading literary translation journals in Poland.

Alexander's poem begins with an exclamation of false admiration: 'Science, science, science! | Everything is beautiful | blown up beneath my glass. | Colors dazzle insect wings.'<sup>411</sup> In Fiedorczuk's version, the length of the verses is similar: two short lines are followed by two longer. To accentuate the chanting effect, however, the second verse rhymes with the third. So that the rhyme can be heard, the scientist's 'glass' becomes 'little glass' – *szkiełko*: 'Nauka, nauka, nauka! | Wszystko jest piękne | kiedy rośnie pod moim szkiełkiem. | Kolory płoną na owadzych skrzydłach.'<sup>412</sup> Already in the first stanza, a certain degree of violence is suggested: Fiedorczuk renders Alexander's 'dazzle' as *płoną*, meaning 'dazzle,' but also 'burn,' thus pointing to the materiality, the liveliness of the object of study, the insects that burn, that need to suffer for a 'bigger,' scientific cause. The word *szkiełko*, in Polish, activates yet another set of associations – with Adam Mickiewicz's 'Romantyczność' (1822). In the famous Romantic manifesto, the poetic 'I' states that 'czucie i wiara silniej mówi do mnie niż mędrca szkiełko i oko' ('the feeling and faith speak more powerfully to me than the wise man's little glass and eye.')413 The word *szkiełko*, not usually applied to refer to magnifying glass (which is typically called *lupa* or *szkło powiększające* in Polish) is, however, fairly recognizable in this context due to its literary use by Mickiewicz. 'Romantyczność' forms part of what is often referred to as the dispute between the Romantics and the Classics. In fact, Mickiewicz's poem was the answer to Jan Śniadecki<sup>414</sup> who published in the journal *Dziennik Wileński* his essay 'O pismach klasycznych i romantycznych'<sup>415</sup> (1819). In 'O pismach...' Śniadecki voices his disapproval of the aesthetics of Romanticism, claiming that the Classics, especially Horace, provide the universal, aesthetic models, in accordance with the 'prawidła poezji' ('principles of poetry.')416

<sup>411</sup> Elizabeth Alexander, 'The Venus Hottentot.' <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52111/the-venus-hottentot>> [accessed 6 September 2020]

<sup>412</sup> Elizabeth Alexander, 'Wiersze', trans. by Julia Fiedorczuk, in *Literatura na Świecie*, 4-5-6/2002, p. 329.

<sup>413</sup> Adam Mickiewicz, 'Romantyczność' (1822) <<https://wolnelektury.pl/katalog/lektura/ballady-i-romanse-romantycznosc.html>> [accessed 3 July 2020]

<sup>414</sup> 1756-1830, mathematician, astronomer, philosopher.

<sup>415</sup> The essay was digitalized by the Polish National Library. <<https://polona.pl/item/o-pismach-klasycznych-i-romantycznych,NzA0MDA0NDY/4/#info:metadata>> [accessed 3 July 2010]

<sup>416</sup> Śniadecki's argument was a response to Kazimierz Brodziński's 'O klasyczności i romantyczności, tudzież o duchu poezji polskiej' (1818) <<https://kpbc.ukw.edu.pl/dlibra/plain-content?id=31189>> [accessed 3 July 2020], which, in turn, triggered other responses, for instance Maurycy Mochnacki's 'Niektóre uwagi nad poezją romantyczną z powodu rozprawy Jana Śniadeckiego „O pismach klasycznych i romantycznych”', published

In Mickiewicz's poem, the protagonist, a village girl, sees the ghost of her dead lover as she mourns her loss. An old man scorns her suffering, he addresses the crowd that had gathered around the girl and says: '— Duchy karczemnej tworem gawiedzi | W głupstwa wywarzone kuźni; | Dziewczyna duby smalone bredzi, | A gmin rozumowi bluźni'<sup>417</sup> ('Ghosts are the creation of the tavern mob | They are brewed in the forge of stupidity. | The girl is ranting and babbling | And the peasants are an offence to reason.') The old man's character is an allusion to Śniadecki, who also used the exact word *duby* ('nonsense,' here I translated the archaic 'duby smalone bredzi' as 'ranting and babbling') in what became a class-related argument disguised as an aesthetic debate. In this regard, the disagreement between the Romantics and the Classics goes far beyond purely linguistic or aesthetic concerns. Śniadecki openly justified the supposed superiority of Classical poetic principles over popular myths by assuming the superiority of the urban intelligentsia over rural communities, as he wrote that: 'Teatra są dla miast i ich mieszkańców, dla ich zabawy i nauki [...], nie wiem, czy takie zgromadzenie przystoi bawić dubami bab wiejskich?'<sup>418</sup> ('Theatres are for the cities and its inhabitants, for their amusement and learning [...], I do not think it is appropriate to amuse such a gathering with an old village lady's nonsense.') Śniadecki's prejudice against peasants and women was thus disguised as a 'universal' aesthetic and intellectual preference. In response, Mickiewicz painted an image in his poem of a village girl in mourning, in a heart-breaking scene that allows the reader to empathize with her.

The anti-Romantic argumentation resonates in Fiedorczuk's translation of Alexander, and it is contrasted with a much more violent expression of exclusion and abuse that we find in Alexander's poem. Alexander's lyrical 'I' emulates or reconstructs Cuvier's voice, underscoring the violent effects of scientific racism on a woman's body: 'Her genitalia | will float inside a labeled | pickling jar in the Musée | de l'Homme on a shelf [...] "The Venus Hottentot." | Elegant facts await me. | Small things in this world are mine.'<sup>419</sup> The organs of the woman, who is constructed and depicted as 'exotic' and eroticized, become almost inhuman; they are transformed into things that need to serve science, in support of 'elegant facts.'

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originally in *Dziennik Warszawski*, 1825, VOL. II, issue 5,7, which constituted only part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century dispute between the Classics and the Romantics.

<sup>417</sup> Adam Mickiewicz, *Poezje*, vol 1 'Wiersze młodzieńcze - Ballady i romanse - Wiersze do r. 1824' (Kraków: Krakowska Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1922) <<https://wolnelektury.pl/katalog/lektura/ballady-i-romanse-romantycznosc.html>> [accessed 3 July 2020]

<sup>418</sup> Jan Śniadecki 'O pismach klasycznych i romantycznych' (Warszawa: s.n., 1837) <<https://polona.pl/item/o-pismach-klasycznych-i-romantycznych,NzA0MDA0NDY/22/#item>> [accessed 3 July 2020]

<sup>419</sup> Alexander, 'The Venus Hottentot.'

By just altering one word, *szkiełko*, in her translation of Alexander, Fiedorczuk activates the association between scientific racism and class-related hate disguised as aesthetics. The ruthlessness of Cuvier's 'research,' with torture justified as a necessary price for science, based on the assumed otherness of black women vis-a-vis the 'universal' standards of 'humanity' or privilege, now also points to the scene from 'Romantyczność', where the cruel exclusion and hatred of women and peasants is justified using 'objective' or 'scientific' criteria of poetic elegance. The complexity of dialogues, or perhaps cultural translations, between various 'scientific' and 'humanistic' views of the world will constitute one of the axes in Fiedorczuk's understanding of writing and translation, which I delve into in the next sections of this chapter. Before I do so, however, I would like to lay out the symbolic framework of translation as perceived by Marçal.

### **Rhythm, Musicality, Difference: Translations As Relationships**

Unlike Fiedorczuk, Marçal does define a 'good' translation. In a draft for her speech at a translation event in Dublin Marçal states that

la millor traducció seria aquella que aconseguís un veritable poema, que pogués funcionar en la nova llengua de manera autònoma. Aquella en què la traducció aconseguís "crear" poesia. Que, llegint-la, gairebé es pogués oblidar que es tracta d'una traducció, si no és per detalls mínims i es pogués llegir com si hagués estat escrit en aquella llengua.<sup>420</sup>

[the best translation would be one that manages to create a true poem, one that could exist autonomously in the new language. One that manages to "create" poetry. One that, when you read it, would almost make you forget it is a translation because, had it not been for minimal details, the translation could be read as if it had been written in the target language].

The 'best' translation, for Marçal, is germane to creation, it is fluent, it allows the reader to 'forget that it is a translation.' The poet's statement may seem a common place, a repetition of the debate on 'fidelity' versus 'beauty' or fluency in translation. It could even bring to mind Lawrence Venuti's argumentation against fluency. For Venuti, a desire for fluency and transparency may result in the translator's 'invisibility,' a term that Venuti uses to refer to the Anglo-American translators who translate into English, taking into account that '[s]ince World

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<sup>420</sup> FMMM, box no. 13, file no. 1.



War II, English has been the most translated language worldwide, but it isn't much translated into, given the number of English-language books published annually.<sup>421</sup> Of course, Venuti's text now is nearly thirty years old, so the situation on the translation market has changed and so has, as I signaled above, the understanding of translation in the era of new technologies. What is more, Marçal's status as a translator into Catalan, into a minoritized language, from the relatively influential French and Russian, is different from that described by Venuti. Marçal points to the conditions of hierarchical multilingualism under which Catalan operates, sharing the publishing market with the more hegemonic Spanish, which, as Lonsdale contended, often forces writers in minority languages to auto-translate their work.<sup>422</sup> As Marçal observes, because of the hegemonic position of Spanish, translation into minority languages may be seen as redundant:

en una literatura com la catalana [...] de fet, es podria prescindir de traduir: aquells que no tinguessin accés a la llengua d'origen podrien llegir traduccions en espanyol. I en canvi hi ha una gran tradició de traduccions —en prosa i en poesia— i, cosa més interessant — una gran part dels poetes catalans han estat i són bons traductors.<sup>423</sup>

[in a literature such as Catalan literature [...] we could, in fact, do without translations: those readers that cannot access some of the source languages could read the Spanish translations. And yet there is a great tradition of translations—in poetry and prose—and, interestingly, a great part of Catalan poets have been and still are great translators].

Because Catalan language suffers from the 'inheritance disadvantage' of hierarchical multilingualism, literature written in Catalan is at risk of being reduced to its political meaning. That is why Marçal sees a creative potential in 'uprooting' or 'reterritorializing' a poem, in reading it out of its putatively "natural" context. Most poems, read outside of their context, may provide new, productive associations and conversations, but it is especially true for a minoritized language, in which, as Marçal observes,

sovint la pròpia situació de precarietat i/o de repressió, el context de resistència pot ser propens a supervalorar alguns aspectes més directament lingüístics o destacables des del punt de vista "local" i ésser cec a altres característiques [...] que apareixen quan els tenim fora del seu propi context.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 14.

<sup>422</sup> Lonsdale, p. 10.

<sup>423</sup> FMMM, box no. 13, file no. 1.

<sup>424</sup> FMMM, box 13, file no. 1.

[oftentimes the situation of repression and precarity of the language causes resistance, which may result in a tendency to value excessively some aspects that seem more outstanding from the “local” point of view or that are more linguistic, we may thus overlook other characteristics [...] which appear [in the poem] when we look [at it] outside of its context].

Translation, thus, may become a means of renewal:

A través de la traducció es pot renovar; de dues maneres: 1) en primer lloc per l'accés a experiències poètiques diferents, sorgides de traduccions diferents i impregnades d'aquest especial matís que confereix cada llengua a la seva poesia 2) En segon lloc, l'elaboració de la llengua a la qual es tradueix, que es veu forçada a dir allò que, potser espontàniament, no hauria dit mai o almenys d'aquella manera concreta.<sup>425</sup>

[Through translation one can renew, in two ways: 1) Firstly, it grants us access to different poetic experiences that arise through different translations, which are imbued with the special nuance that every language offers to its poetry, 2) Secondly, the elaboration of the language into which one translates, which is now forced to say things that perhaps it would never have said spontaneously, or not in this specific manner.]

Reassembling the hierarchy of meanings through translation becomes, for Marçal, a gesture against the petrification, ideological and otherwise, of poetry. Translation thus offers the possibility of growth and renewal for both the original and the target language – almost as if languages could establish an intimate relationship, from which they both learn and through which they are transformed. As a result of this inter-lingual encounter, a mixing of perspectives and symbolic repertoires is born, which broadens the scope of meaning in both languages. For example, thanks to Montserrat Abelló's translations, Sylvia Plath's reflections on the figure of a distant, oppressive father, contained in *Daddy*, reached the Catalan-speaking public, including Marçal, who continued the dialogue in *Desglaç*, painting an image of a conservative, patriarchal father, who was nevertheless loved, and whose death both burdened his daughter and set her free. Marçal also accessed the work of Adrienne Rich in Abelló's translations. Rich became another important Anglophone reference for Marçal, this time to reflect on the topic of lesbian desire in literature.

While acknowledging the geopolitical hierarchies in the process of translation, Marçal also perceived translation in terms of personal relationships or ‘conversations’ between authors; she saw translation as an opportunity to learn from the authors she was translating, allowing her own work to be influenced by other women's thoughts and poetic tools. An examples of such

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<sup>425</sup> FMMM, box 13, file no. 1.

‘conversation’ was Marçal’s elaboration of the poems by Anna Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetaeva. Marçal collaborated with a Czech-born writer and translator Monika Zgustova to publish two books that contained selections of poems by Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966) and Marina Tsvetaeva (1892-1941), translated from Russian, via Zgustova’s philological<sup>426</sup> translations.

Anna Akhmatova, one of Russia’s most canonical poets, also wrote prose, including memoirs, autobiographical pieces, and literary critique. She is known for her concise and concrete style and the use of everyday objects to elicit profound emotional and ethical associations. As opposed to Akhmatova’s containment, Marina Tsvetaeva’s verses are filled with passion; she is also famous for her unusual syntax and punctuation. Personally, Marçal confesses to having a slight preference for Tsvetaeva. In a letter to Jean-Paul Goujon, with whom Marçal maintained an extensive correspondence, Marçal says she prefers Tsvetaeva to Akhmatova, justifying her choice with her perception of Tsvetaeva’s personality:

sóc jo qui la prefereix, encara que els seus poemes siguin molt més difícils de traduir —i d’entendre—; però potser és per això? Ja que vaig haver de fer un esforç més gran per ‘assimilar-la,’ sens dubte... Però crec que és perquè la seva personalitat —més intempestiva, passional, contradictòria, etc.— m’atrau més.<sup>427</sup>

[it is me who prefers her, even though her poems are far more difficult to translate —and to understand—: but maybe this is the reason? Since I, undoubtedly, had to make a bigger effort to ‘assimilate’ her... But I think it’s because I find her personality more attractive — more untimely, passionate, contradictory, etc.]

The descriptions of Marçal’s translating experience blend, in the fragment above, with her conjectures regarding Tsvetaeva’s personality, entirely ‘deduced’ from Tsvetaeva’s translated texts that Marçal could read in Zgustova’s translation. Marçal metaphorizes translation in terms of friendship or romantic relationship – she speaks of Tsvetaeva’s ‘passionate personality,’ which she finds more ‘attractive.’ Rather than treating Tsvetaeva’s texts as autonomous beings, purified of the corporeality of their authors and the political conditions that surrounded and affected them, Marçal speaks of reading other women writers’ texts as if she was conversing

<sup>426</sup> Zgustova’s collaboration with Marçal consisted of a two-step writing process: first, Zgustova selected and produced word-for-word translations of the Russian poems into Catalan, then Marçal transformed the texts, taking into account meter, rhythm and poetic imagery. I will use the term “philological translation” to refer to Zgustova’s initial task of rendering the contents of the poems, in order for Marçal to elaborate the texts formally. I will also be using the term “philological translation” to refer to translations deemed by their authors as a work-in-progress or a word-for-word rendering of the original text, produced in order to perform a critical analysis of the original texts.

<sup>427</sup> Marçal, *El senyal de la pèrdua*, p. 162.

with the authors themselves. An imagined, passionate friendship or desire towards the writer appears as one of the reasons for Marçal to initiate the translation project.

Another reason for Marçal's interest concerns the relationship between the authors and their historical circumstances, which she explores in an essay on both poets entitled 'Com en la nit, les flames,' ('Just like the flames, at night') first presented as a performative lecture. Both Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova lived in prerevolutionary and Soviet Russia, both suffered political persecution and had their family members executed or sent to labor camps. Marçal's reading of Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova directs a curious gaze at the two writers' rendering of the political regime that they endured. The biographical, for Marçal, is always political. In 'Com en la nit, les flames....,' she writes:

Les tràgiques èpoques queden reflectides en l'obra de les dues escriptores tan bé com la seva vida personal. Bona part dels seus poemes poden ser entesos com les pàgines d'un peculiar dietari, d'un dietari, no cal insistir-hi, d'una extraordinària qualitat.<sup>428</sup>

[The tragic epochs are reflected in the work of both writers as well as their personal lives. A great part of their poems may be understood as pages of a peculiar diary, a diary, needless to say, of extraordinary quality.]

This is not to say that Marçal intended to reduce the writers she took interest in to their biography, but rather that in the political historicity of one's circumstances she searched for the 'indices and fragments'<sup>429</sup> that would allow her to connect with the authors. In Zgustova's memories of their collaboration, the image of Maria-Mercè Marçal that the Czech poet transmits is that of a friend and a comrade. As Monika Zgustova recalls:

La meva amiga continua parlant de les dues poetes russes, i jo reconec en les seves paraules els temes que més li interessen en la seva pròpia poesia. 'En totes dues, la condició de dona tenyeix sempre la seva vivència de les coses i de la poesia, t'hi has fixat?', diu.<sup>430</sup>

[My friend carries on talking about the two Russian poets, and I recognize in her words the topics of most interest to her in her own poetry. 'The condition of being a woman always shines through their experience of things and that of poetry, have you noticed?,' she asks.]

<sup>428</sup>Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvietàieva, 'Poema de la fi i altres poemes/ Rèquiem i altres poemes', transl. by Maria-Mercè Marçal and Monika Zgustova (Barcelona: Proa, 2004), p. 16.

<sup>429</sup>'indicis i fragments,' in: Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac*, p. 158.

<sup>430</sup>Akhmatova, Tsvietàieva, 'Poema de la fi i altres poemes,' pp. 10-12.

In her conversation with Zgustova, Marçal comments on the main topics in the poems that she will be translating, as if to merge the various, intertwined elements into an autonomous, harmonious whole. Both with Zgustova, with whom Marçal was completing a translation project, and with the poets they were translating, Marçal established a passionate, intellectual, and affective connection. ‘The condition of being a woman’ as understood by Marçal is far from an essentialist statement on what womanhood means. In discussing biographical circumstances of the authors she studies, Marçal pays attention to the authors’ differing views and histories. Finding out about the circumstances of the authors was just as important for Marçal as ‘listening’ to them, trying to understand their choices. But the listening, at times, acquired a literal sense, as we find out from Zgustova’s account of her conversation with Marçal:

‘Vols que te’n faci cinc cèntims, de la mena de versos?’ vaig preguntar. ‘No cal. Saps què? Llegeix-m’ho en rus, a veure com sona.’ Mentre ho llegeixo, Maria-Mercè escolta atentament, pren uns quants apunts i reflexiona en veu alta: ‘Això és un alexandrí, això un decasíl·lab.’ I afegeix: ‘El rus és una llengua dolça i melòdica. Almenys els versos que acabes de llegir ho són.’<sup>431</sup>

[‘Would you like me to talk a little bit about the kind of stanzas?’, I asked. ‘There’s no need. You know what? Just read it to me, I’ll see what it sounds like’. While I’m reading, Maria-Mercè listens carefully, she takes some notes and observes: ‘This is an alexandrine, this is a dodecasyllabic verse’. Then she adds: ‘Russian is a sweet and melodious language. At least the verses you have just read are like this.’]

In the fragment quoted, Marçal’s first focus has to do with musicality, with rhyme, rhythm, sound, and cadence. When hearing her friend read verses out loud in the original Russian, Marçal observes the poetic form with its various connotations. Marçal’s emphasis on musicality resembles the simile used by Norman Davies to comment on the translations of his books on Polish history, written in English, into Polish. Concerning his collaboration with Elżbieta Tabakowska, cognitive linguist and accomplished translator, Davies describes translation as ‘a melody played on a different instrument or in a different key’<sup>432</sup> – different, but still recognizable, like ‘Bach’s Air on a G-string which was written for violin,’<sup>433</sup> but could also be played ‘on a trombone and in the key of B flat.’<sup>434</sup> For Davies, ‘Some arrangements could be

<sup>431</sup> Akhmàtova, Tsvietàieva, *Poema de la fi i altres poemes*, p. 10-12.

<sup>432</sup> Elżbieta Tabakowska, *O przekładzie na przykładzie. Rozprawa tłumacza z Europą Normana Daviesa* (Kraków: Znak, 2008), p. 6.

<sup>433</sup> Tabakowska, p. 6.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

almost as good as Bach's. But they can never produce exactly the same sound.'<sup>435</sup> Indeed, both metaphorizations of translation – a personal relationship and a musical composition – bear a certain resemblance. To quote Davies again, 'the relationship between author and translator remains crucial. Each needs confidence in the other.'<sup>436</sup> Davies describes his collaboration with Tabakowska as a 'harmonious partnership of equals' in which the author was 'singing a steady *basso sostenuto*,' while the translator 'was able to turn in a *bravura* performance in the soprano register, and occasionally to dazzle her audience with *coloratura* passages.'<sup>437</sup>

In Marçal's versions of Akhmatova, the "musicality" of the alexandrine as a starting point for the search for equivalence in translation evokes a series of wider issues, such as the tension between the "universal" and the "particular" in language. Marçal's remark on the musicality of Russian, while reflecting a foreignizing gaze towards Russian, seems to express a search for a musical perception of poetic form that overshadows the differences, in an attempt to grasp a partial impression of the form beyond the particularity of each language. Marçal's mention of musicality evokes both the 'universality' of the canonical metrical forms ('This is an alexandrine, this is a dodecasyllabic verse') and the 'particularity' of rendering them in different languages. When "listening to" Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova, Marçal "hears" the alexandrine which, as is commonly assumed, carries additional meanings conveyed by the verse itself, traditionally used for the prestigious genres of epic and tragedy. Russian alexandrines, just like the French and the Catalan ones, were composed of twelve-syllable verses with a caesura after the sixth syllable. We can suspect that, after Marçal "heard" the alexandrine read to her in Russian, she also heard, sensed, or suspected the possibility of translating it, of preserving its accentuation convincingly, by using a combination of "equivalent" metrical solutions in Catalan. Of course, the formal features of the alexandrine exceed the simple syllable count – it can also be identified due to its unique accentuation which, although different in various European languages, suggests the solemn, epic musicality of an iambic hexameter and which, as we can

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> Tabakowska, p. 12.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid. As a side note, I shall mention that, as a former student of Professor Tabakowska, I remember her lectures on cognitive linguistics as a calm and joyful celebration of linguistic and cultural diversity; I find it hard to imagine her perform in a high-pitched, strident *coloratura* soprano. Davies' gendered image seems to be founded on the heteronormative imaginings of 'harmony' or natural symmetry between the stereotypically 'feminine' *soprano* and the 'masculine' *basso*, which blurs the specificity of both the author and the translator beyond their perceived gender. Still, the simile suggests that both the translation and text that is being translated form a harmonious whole, they are the result of a collaboration rather than a struggle between the translator and the author, whose perspectives and whose work are to be treated equally.

presume, could still be “heard” although not necessarily rendered in a way that imitates exactly the sound of the source language. With regard to equivalence in poetic form, Marçal sees the formal features of the poem as ‘part de l’essència mateixa del poema’<sup>438</sup> (‘part of the very essence of the poem,’) which ‘se’ns presenta davant com un repte. Cal, llavors, intentar un pacte entre el respecte i la llibertat’<sup>439</sup> (‘appears as a challenge. We must, then, attempt a compromise between respect and freedom.’) In translating Akhmatova, Marçal claims to seek a balance between reproducing the sound and using poetic forms that are traditionally established in Catalan. The reference to the ‘musicality’ of the verse, or of the Russian language itself as perceived by Marçal, alludes to an imagined ‘universality’ of poetic sounds beyond the particularity of specific traditions, as if the meaning could be heard in the original poem. The functional intention to cross-lingual “universality” of the alexandrine, along with its inner, formal multiplicity remain inscribed, on the other hand, within territorial boundaries, as the verse originates from the established, European literary canon.

But some features cannot be “heard” in a poem, in the literal sense of “hearing”, the most obvious of which includes punctuation, the graphic outline of the poem or the use of grammar as a poetic tool (the latter very common in Tsvetaeva, whom Marçal and Zgustova were translating into a much less inflected language).<sup>440</sup> Tsvetaeva’s original punctuation seems especially difficult in translation, as we find out from Margaret Wettlin’s and Walter Arndt’s footnote in the volume that contains Tsvetaeva’s correspondence with Boris Pasternak and Rainer Maria Rilke, which Wettlin and Arnd translated into English. As the translators claim, ‘Tsvetayeva’s syntax and punctuation (which consists chiefly if not wholly in artless anarchism, nautilus-like convolutions, parenthetical emendations, and showers of dots, dashes, and quotation marks) have been preserved in the translation as far as seemed advisable, and a little beyond.’<sup>441</sup> In Zgustova’s memories of her collaboration with the Catalan poet we do not find the description of Zgustova’s comments and corrections after receiving the poetic versions of her translations, we only learn that the two poets worked separately and reflected on each other’s work in

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<sup>438</sup> FMMM, box no. 13, file no. 1.

<sup>439</sup> FMMM, box no. 13, file no. 1.

<sup>440</sup> In the translator’s preface, Elaine Feinstein discusses Tsvetaeva’s syntactic repetitions and describes them as impossible to render in a non-inflected language ‘without confusing the reader’. See: Elaine Feinstein, ‘Introduction’ in: Marina Tsvetaeva, *Selected poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 15.

<sup>441</sup> Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetaeva, Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters: Summer 1926*, ed. by Yevgeny Pasternak, Yelena Pasternak and Konstantin M. Azadovsky, trans. by Margaret Wettlin and Walter Arndt (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1985), p. 81.

conversation. The extent to which Marçal was exposed to or made aware of the specific graphic and grammatical traits of the texts (and the scope of informed choices that she had when deciding on rendering Tsvetaeva's syntax and punctuation) is not entirely clear. However, as we learn from Lluïsa Julià's biography of Marçal, Marçal worked extensively to clarify and present the historical and linguistic background of the poems before submitting the final versions to print.<sup>442</sup>

From the drafts for her PhD project that I found in Marçal's archive, I learned that Marçal's attention to musicality in translation had a much longer history than the simple remark on the sound of Russian. In her PhD drafts, Marçal was analyzing Maragall's rendering of the Homeric *Hymns*, paying detailed attention to the reproduction of sound. Marçal describes Maragall as 'un poeta enormement influït per la música – fins i tot semblava que arribava a Goethe a través de l'òpera de Gounod'<sup>443</sup> 'a poet greatly influenced by music – it even seems that he discovered Goethe thanks to Gounod's opera.' Marçal warns her readers against the stereotyped perception of Maragall as a 'poeta descarat i espontaneista'<sup>444</sup> ('careless and overly spontaneous poet.') To illustrate the regularity of Maragall's meter, Marçal begins her reflection on translation by analyzing Maragall's original poem 'La sardana,'<sup>445</sup> which

està format per una combinació ben estranya de versos eneasíl·labics, endecasíl·labs, decasíl·labs i pentasíl·labs. Tot i ser els dos primers un tipus de vers amb poca tradició en català i difícilment combinables amb els decasíl·labs, el poema fa una impressió de ritme regularíssim. [...] Potser és un dels poemes més rigorosos de l'autor amb unes estrofes d'esquema ben definit, [...] de construcció quasi-noucentista, pre-noucentista hauria de dir.<sup>446</sup>

[consists of a quite strange combination of the eneasyllable, hendecasyllable, decasyllable and pentasyllable. Although the eneasyllable and the hendecasyllable have a short tradition in Catalan and are difficult to combine with the decasyllable, the poems create

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<sup>442</sup> Julià describes the process as follows: 'En les diverses trobades, Monika Zgustova li anava aclarint el sentit dels versos en el context rus, aspectes que sols li podia proporcionar qui en coneix a fons la tradició literària. Després, Marçal es llegia tots els llibres que el mercat li proporcionava.' ('During various meetings, Monika Zgustova was explaining to her the meaning of the verses in the Russian context, the aspects of the poems that could only be provided by someone with profound knowledge of the literary tradition to which they belong. After that, Marçal would read all the books that the market made available to her.') Julià, *Maria-Mercè Marçal. Una vida*, p. 309.

<sup>443</sup> FMMM, box no. 14, file no. 7. Marçal probably refers to 'Faust', the 1859 opera by the nineteenth-century French composer Charles-François Gounod.

<sup>444</sup> FMMM, box no. 14, file no. 7.

<sup>445</sup> Published in 1900, as part of *Visions & Cants*. On-line version of *Visions & Cants* available at *Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes* <[http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/visions-amp-cants--0/html/ff332948-82b1-11d1-acc7-002185ce6064\\_2.html#I\\_23\\_](http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/visions-amp-cants--0/html/ff332948-82b1-11d1-acc7-002185ce6064_2.html#I_23_)> [accessed 8 June 2010]

<sup>446</sup> FMMM, box no. 14, file no. 7.



an impression of an extremely regular rhythm. [...] It may be one of this author's most rigorous poems with a very regular format of the stanza [...]; the construction could almost be described as *noucentista*, or should I say *pre-noucentista*.]

Thus, the regularity of Maragall's 'La sardana' is not explained by applying any specific metrical scheme established in Catalan. The regular rhythm, for Marçal, does not have to be an exact copy of an already existing scheme, for even an original metrical format may still reproduce the impression of regularity. For Marçal,

El secret —gens secret, d'altra banda— del ritme que unifica una combinació de versos tan heterodoxa i que, alhora ens fa una impressió tan forta d'ortodòxia, és que Maragall aplica a aquest poema, i de forma rigorosíssima, com he dit abans, un esquema de tipus accentual ben similar al que més tard li serviria per adaptar al català els metres clàssics: el poema, que preten reproduir el ritme de la sardana —dos temps fluixos, un temps fort— arriba per aquesta banda a fer funcionar unes unitats rítmiques que, d'una banda, excedeixen el vers (...) I, al mateix temps, el ritme ve determinat per uns elements més petits assimilables als peus mètrics.<sup>447</sup>

[The secret —which is no secret on the other hand— of creating a rhythm that unifies such a heterodox combination of verses and, at the same time, produces such an orthodox impression, is that in this poem Maragall applies (very rigorously, as I already said) an accent type similar to the one that later he will use to adapt the Classical meters to Catalan. The poem, which seeks to reproduce the rhythm of the sardana —two long cycles and one short— thus manages to create two rhythmic wholes that go beyond the verse and that work together [...]. The rhythm is also determined by other, smaller elements that are possible to be assimilated to the rhythmic feet.]

Marçal then suggests that the apparent 'irregularity' of Maragall's translations of Homer may stem from the same conviction that regularity is not equal to exact formal equivalence.<sup>448</sup> In searching for the origins of Maragall's translation strategies in 'La sardana,' (written ten years before Maragall started translating the Homeric *Hymns*<sup>449</sup>) Marçal portrays the original work of the poet and the translations he created later as parts of an interconnected continuum. Creating poetry would, therefore, affect translations, and translating would appear germane to writing. The fragment quoted above shows Marçal's sensitivity to reproducing the formal features of a poem in translation, a sensitivity that remains flexible rather than prescriptive. Marçal avoids recommending a specific, limited number of metrical solutions to translate hexameters; she does,

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> See: The Maragall chronology: <[http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/portales/joan\\_maragall/autor\\_cronologia](http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/portales/joan_maragall/autor_cronologia)> [accessed 8 June 2020]

however, refer to the sensation of unity and regularity that the translated poem should produce. Although very much aware of the problems in transposing epic meter from ancient Greek and Latin into stress-timed languages, Marçal did see alternative measures of translation (not limited to reproducing the six feet system, which is reliant on the regular timing of the phonetic sounds) as valid.

To summarize, relationality, musicality and sound point to a way of communicating that appear to be interconnected and important to Marçal. The communication of poetic meaning becomes the transmission of sound and rhythm rather than the exact imitation of any language-specific conventions. To communicate also means to create community, which leads to a new sense of communality, a political complicity between writers, which is based on a dialogue across specific languages and historical circumstances rather than on the nation understood as an abstract, monolithic, imagined community. Marçal's depiction of translation and musicality may be read as indicative of her problematization of boundaries – between the author and the translator, the reader and the author, and of course between and within languages.

In her writings, Marçal often uses musical terminology to refer to texts, as if “translating” her thoughts from language into sound. In her references to rhyme, rhythm and cadence, the comments on the “musicality” in Akhmatova and Tsvetaeva, Marçal expresses an understanding of translation that goes beyond the immediate definition of “transporting meaning,” which typically entails a ‘transfer,’ albeit always inexact or troubled, from one language to another. As Roman Jakobson famously explained, translation may occur not only between languages but also within the same language or between different codes of expression, such as literature and music.<sup>450</sup> An intersemiotic perspective may be observed, for instance, in the outline of *Cartografies de desig*, a book edited by Marçal which offers a written version of a series of dramatized readings originally performed together with musical pieces (the scores are included in the book). The pieces, composed by Anna Bofill for the occasion, often allude to the titles and general mood of the papers that precede them, as was the case of ‘Dansa obliqua’ (‘Oblique dance’), played after Marçal's paper ‘En dansa obliqua de miralls...’ (‘In an oblique dance of mirrors...’) The musical pieces are thus linked to the essays, to the Marçalian motif of poetic musicality.

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<sup>450</sup> Roman Jakobson, ‘On linguistic aspects of translation’ in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London/New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 114.

Like all translations, intersemiotic transfers in Marçal cause refractions and transformations of meaning: the melody of a written poem does not of course refer to a melody in a literal sense, nor is a simile an actual image or illustration of sameness. Yet the use of extra-textual metaphors in describing poetic translation contributes to a shift in the understanding of poetry, it suggests the potential for a synthesis of different forms of perception and knowledge of the world associated with different modes of expression. For Fiedorczuk too, translation embraces a wider perspective than just transferring meaning from one language to another. In the following section, I take a closer look not only at the importance of the intersemiotic, but also interdisciplinary transfers in Fiedorczuk's work.

### **Oil from The Flinty Rock: Intersemiotic Transfers, Ecopoetics, Third Culture**

In translating the works of Laurie Anderson, musician, performer and poet, into Polish, Fiedorczuk problematizes the movement not only between languages but also across different codes of expression. In a text about Anderson, Fiedorczuk remembers the American poet's meeting with readers in Wrocław, during which Anderson 'włożyła sobie do ust urządzenie, które "tłumaczyło" jej głos na dźwięk skrzypiec'<sup>451</sup> ('put an object in her mouth that "translated" her voice into the sound of violin.') Fiedorczuk describes the shift from words to music as translation; in an interview with Anderson, the Polish author asks Anderson: 'Czy [...] pomysł, aby wziąć udział w festiwalu poetyckim, podczas którego odbędzie się premiera książki z przekładami pani tekstów i opowieści na polski – język bardzo przecież odległy od angielskiego – to nowość?'<sup>452</sup> ('Is the idea [...] to participate in a poetry festival at which a book with your texts and narrations translated into Polish will be launched, is new to you? After all, Polish is a language very distant from English.') Like Marçal, Fiedorczuk asks the question about distance in the context of communicating through music and sound, as if suggesting a certain 'universal' dimension of music, contrasted with the 'particularity' of each language. Anderson praises 'the oldest musical instrument which is the human voice,'<sup>453</sup> thus suggesting that technology and nature are not so far away from each other.

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<sup>451</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, Laurie Anderson, 'Niczego nie robić dwa razy', *dwutygodnik.com*, Issue 141: 09/2014. <<https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artukul/5423-niczego-nie-robic-dwa-razy.html>> [accessed 20 October 2019]

<sup>452</sup> Fiedorczuk, Laurie Anderson, 'Rozmowa z Laurie Anderson,' *Polityka*, April 2012. <<https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/1526261,2,rozmowa-z-laurie-anderson.read>> [accessed 20 October 2019]

<sup>453</sup> Fiedorczuk, Anderson, 'Rozmowa z Laurie Anderson.'

In her own literary work, Fiedorczuk often ‘translates’ from image to word. Some of Fiedorczuk’s poems suggest a blending, dialogue or transition between different forms of representation. In her poem ‘Sorella la luna’, while the poetic ‘I’ is describing landscapes, a little girl exclaims ‘*Mommy, what biiiig music!*’<sup>454</sup> Another poem, ‘Kochankowie na niebieskim tle’ (‘Lovers on a Sky-Blue Background,’) describes a pair of lovers gazing into the sky, looking at what at the beginning of the poem seems to be the sun, then a falling star, then a pair of lovers floating in the sky.

Takie przestrzenie, gdzie się bez skrupułów  
leje dzikie światło, to z powodu słońca (które jest dziurą  
w wielkim worku lawy). Strefa skrzydeł—  
mocny, stabilny, prosty lot i błyskawiczne  
zejście w dół, prawie swobodny spadek masy  
na cel.  
I skąd tam oni? Nad dachami, nad głowami drzew?  
Ponad umorusaną wykładziną chmur?  
Jakiż to dziwny pojazd, napędzany snami, ich tam wyniósł?<sup>455</sup>

[Expanses where a feral light pours down, | unscrupulous, because of the sun (which is a hole | in a vast sack of lava). Zone of wings— | a strong, straight, steady flight and lightning | descent, almost a free fall of the mass | toward its goal. | How did they get there, over the roofs and tops of trees, | Above the dirtied flooring of the clouds? | What strange conveyance, powered by dreams, has brought them there?]<sup>456</sup>

The poem paints an image, which perhaps alludes to Marc Chagall’s painting ‘Fiancés dans le ciel de Nice.’ In describing an image, Fiedorczuk broadens the scope of potential, intertextual referents to include images too, thus opening up a field for discussion on the limits of the poetic ekphrasis.

In the novel *Nieważkość*, among multiple pictorial references, there is a description of photograph with a naked girl in it, described as painted in dark gold, standing next to a bicycle and looking like a ‘cyberpunkowa nimfa’<sup>457</sup> ‘cyberpunk nymph.’ The photograph alludes to the Hungarian artist Peter Puklus’ photobook *The Epic Love Story of a Warrior*.<sup>458</sup> In the novel, after the picture of the girl there appears a picture of the same girl next to her bike, against the

<sup>454</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, *Oxygen*, trans. by Bill Johnston (Brookline, Massachusetts: Zephyr Press, 2017), p. 28-29. In the original: ‘Mamo, jaka duuuuża muzyka!’

<sup>455</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Oxygen*, p. 46.

<sup>456</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Oxygen*, p. 47.

<sup>457</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość*, p. 30.

<sup>458</sup> Peter Puklus, *The Epic Love Story of a Warrior* (London: Self Publish, Be Happy, 2016) <<http://peterpuklus.com/the-epic-love-story-of-a-warrior>> [accessed 17 July 2021]

background of the photography of the girl and bike. Then there is another photo of the bike alone, with a golden trace of the woman's glutes and labia impressed on the seat.<sup>459</sup> In the novel, Fiedorczuk dialogues with the original photograph by Puklus, drawing the reader's attention to the fact that the machine remains in contact with the body of the model, that the bike is used by the girl or perhaps the girl and the bike are part of the same cyborg-body. The woman who rides the bike, who uses it to move, as another limb, blends with the bike, she impresses on the bike's body the mark of her organs. Likewise, in Fiedorczuk's texts bodies, tools and machines are not distanced from each other, the 'natural' and the 'artificial' remain in constant dialogue.

The dialogue between modes of expression, for Fiedorczuk, is linked to another metaphor of 'translation,' related to mixing the 'spiritual' language of poetry with the language of science. In Fiedorczuk's and Beltrán's *Ecopoetics*, a description of an image —William Blake's picture of Newton— opens a reflection on the possibility of 'translating' between the languages of science and arts and humanities. According to Beltrán and Fiedorczuk,

Blake depicts Newton as sitting naked on a rock, perhaps at the bottom of the sea, and drawing something with a pair of compasses, so completely focused on the straight lines of the sketch that he does not notice the actual world around him. Behind the scientist's back the rock is vivid with color and texture but Newton is blind to the exuberance of nature. The drawing reflects Blake's skepticism towards the values promoted by the Enlightenment [...]. This new approach to the world, based on instrumental rationality, remains indifferent to the spiritual dimensions of human and non-human reality.<sup>460</sup>

According to Fiedorczuk and Beltrán, Blake's painting symbolizes a complete focus on the 'straight lines' of the mathematical sketch, without perceiving the 'color and texture' of the rock – without perceiving it with all one's senses and engaging it in the scientific creation. The discourse of science and reason here is contrasted with spirituality, but also with empirical perception. Fiedorczuk and Beltrán evoke the Scientific Revolution, not only as the beginning of a despiritualized vision of the world, based on instrumental rationality, but also as the origin of the human ideologies of control over nature, resulting in the destruction of the planet and fostering a conflict between a 'humanistic' and a 'scientific' perception of the world.<sup>461</sup> In reference to the 1959 Cambridge lecture 'The Two Cultures,' in which Charles Percy Snow

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<sup>459</sup> I could not find this last picture in the catalogue of Puklus' exposition.

<sup>460</sup> Fiedorczuk, Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka / Ecopoética / Ecopoetics*, p. 201.

<sup>461</sup> Fiedorczuk, Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka / Ecopoética / Ecopoetics*, p. 204.

complained about the gap between sciences and humanities,<sup>462</sup> Fiedorczuk and Beltrán claim that the conflict has shifted from privileging the humanities to privileging science as the desired area of interests for an ‘intellectual as such.’<sup>463</sup> Fiedorczuk and Beltrán also point to Snow’s narrow definitions of both sciences and humanities, which, according to the authors, contribute to an impaired academic communication that limits the access to knowledge:

A narrow view of nature based on instrumental rationality [...] remains blind (and deaf) to nature’s most vital meanings precluding dialogue and resulting in a rift between the so called ‘hard sciences’, supposedly dealing with objective knowledge, and the spiritual realm of the arts. The existence of this chasm, often referred to as ‘the two cultures’, constitutes a serious obstacle to the development of human ways of knowing.<sup>464</sup>

For Fiedorczuk and Beltrán, ‘the attempts to create the “third culture” have so far almost always privileged science over the arts and instrumental reason over the imagination.’<sup>465</sup> One of the aims of ecopoetics, which both authors postulate in their essay, ‘is to move beyond the notion of the third culture as it is usually conceptualized and to postulate ecopoetics as an integrative practice leading to the production of new ways of knowing and living.’<sup>466</sup> Ecopoetics, thus, could be seen as a multilingual and multidisciplinary enterprise directed towards creating a synthesis of knowledge, which will lead to creating a home: in language, but also through the everyday practices of mindful cohabiting with the non-human dwellers of the planet. The production of meaning, for Fiedorczuk and Beltrán, is not exclusive to humans, it is an expression of the mutual entanglement of different elements of the world:

Drawing inspiration from biosemiotics and new materialism, ecocriticism rejects the dichotomous ontology juxtaposing humans (as conscious, active agents) to (passive and meaningless) ‘nature’ or ‘matter’. [...] The intuition that diverse elements of the world — human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, material and spiritual, natural and artificial— are interconnected or, as quantum physics would express it, *entangled*, have often surfaced in poetry. When Blake spoke of the vision of ‘a universe in a grain of sand’ it was in opposition to the mechanistic view of nature which assumed that things could be broken down to smaller elements and then examined, as if each element existed independently of all the others.<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> See: Charles Percy Snow, *The Two Cultures* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.)

<sup>463</sup> Fiedorczuk, Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka / Ecopoética / Ecopoetics*, pp. 221-225.

<sup>464</sup> Fiedorczuk, Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka / Ecopoética / Ecopoetics*, p. 204.

<sup>465</sup> Fiedorczuk, Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka / Ecopoética / Ecopoetics*, p. 205.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

<sup>467</sup> Fiedorczuk, Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka / Ecopoética / Ecopoetics*, p. 229.

The movement ‘beyond’ also means mixing and transforming, it means listening, as ‘the sense of hearing is fundamental to poetry’<sup>468</sup> – in this conviction the two authors certainly coincide with Marçal, whose interest and focus on the rhythmic and melodious dimensions of poetry I discussed in the previous section. For Fiedorczuk and Beltrán, ‘Poetry makes it possible to experience and share moments of intense perceptual clarity. Contesting the scopocentrism of modern culture poetry focuses on the sense of hearing.’<sup>469</sup> In postulating an objection to scopocentrism, Beltrán and Fiedorczuk’s statement also dialogues with the fundamental claim of material ecocriticism, summarized by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann as follows: ‘the world’s material phenomena are knots in a vast network of agencies, which can be “read” and interpreted as forming narratives, stories.’<sup>470</sup> Thus, the transfer of meaning no longer occurs exclusively between human languages, disciplines of knowledge or codes of expression; meaning can also be transferred from non-human codes of communication and phenomena.

In her recent poem ‘Ewolucje,’ recorded together with Beltrán, Fiedorczuk not only experiments with voice, but also shifts between different discourses, the poetic, the mythical and the scientific, to talk about the great extinction of species. In the recording that accompanies the text published on-line, Fiedorczuk reads her poem against Beltrán’s background reading of the names of the species that were killed at different points in history.<sup>471</sup> In the poem, human and non-human history appear entwined, they inter-exist or inter-are. The Cambrian period is depicted as the origin of human philosophy and art:

*Zona Paradoxides: środkowy Kambr, conatus nabiera rozmachu, fantazja komórek, żeby  
dzielić się tak, a nie inaczej, i łączyć*

inaczej,

inaczej,

szum

podzielony na nuty, rozczesywanie barw, z których powstaną

pejzaże,

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<sup>468</sup> Fiedorczuk, Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka / Ecopoética / Ecopoetics*, p. 206.

<sup>469</sup> Fiedorczuk, Beltrán, *Ekopoetyka / Ecopoética / Ecopoetics*, pp. 205-206.

<sup>470</sup> Serenella Iovino, Serpil Oppermann, ed., *Material Ecocriticism* (Indiana University Press, 2014), p.1.  
<<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/CAM/detail.action?docID=2120324>> [accessed 30 July 2017]

<sup>471</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, ‘Ewolucje’, in *dwutygodnik.com* <<https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/8224-wiersze.html>> [accessed 20 October 2019]

historia malarstwa,

my.<sup>472</sup>

[*Zona Paradoxides*: mid-Cambrian, *conatus* begins to gain momentum, the fantasy of cells to divide in this way, and not differently, to merge | differently, | differently, | the noise | divided into notes, the combing of colors that split, of which there will emerge | landscapes, | the history of painting, | us.]

In the mid-Cambrian, where the genus of *Paradoxides*, an extinct group of arthropods<sup>473</sup> is situated. Human and non-human creativity are equal in the poem; while the *conatus* (which, in the history of thought refers to the effort, the striving of mind, of matter, to continue existing)<sup>474</sup> gains its momentum, the cells split and merge with an unpredictable “fantasy,” just like notes or colors which are merged or divided by artists.<sup>475</sup> Soon the creation and destruction of species and landscapes will give rise to art and to “us,” the humans. In the poem, the natural phenomena and their human interpretation co-exist or rather inter-exist, they influence and mutually transform each other. The perception of time becomes blurred or circular rather than linear as, in the subsequent stanzas, the entwined structure is repeated, as if suggesting a recurrent cycle:

Pięć razy Wielkie Wymieranie (ordowik, dewon, perm, trias, kreda). I eomaja, mama, pierwszy ssak: długość ciała 14 cm, masa 25 gram

(waga płodu między 17 a 20 tygodniem ludzkiej ciąży). τῇ καλλίστῃ:

Wielkie Wymieranie

oliwa ze skały krzemiennej

(nic nie znaczy)

A Tetyda urodziła Achillesa. Zamknięcie oceanu –

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<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

<sup>473</sup> ‘Paradoxides,’ in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <<https://www.britannica.com/animal/Paradoxides>> [accessed 20 July 2020]

<sup>474</sup> ‘Conatus,’ in *Cambridge Dictionary of English* <<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/conatus>> [accessed 20 July 2020]

<sup>475</sup> Momentum, a word directly appropriated from Latin into English only appears right after *conatus*, a loan from Latin, in the English translation. In Polish, ‘momentum’ is ‘rozmach,’ a word of Slavonic origin.



dziesięć milionów lat temu.<sup>476</sup>

[Five times the Great Extinction (The Ordovician, The Devonian, The Permian, The Triassic, The Cretaceous). And Eomaia, mommy, the first | mammal: length of the body 14 cm, mass 25 grams | (the mass of a fetus between the 17th and the 20th week of human pregnancy). τῇ καλλίστῃ: | The Great Extinction | the oil from the flinty rock | (means nothing) | And Thetis gave birth to Achilles. The closure of the ocean – | ten million years ago.]

Beauty, τῇ καλλίστῃ, is followed by a colon, with the subsequent references that may be interpreted as definitions of beauty: the Great Extinction, the oil from the flinty rock (which, according to the Song of Moses, God fed to Jacob<sup>477</sup> and which, in the poem ‘means nothing’ or does not matter) and Thetis, the mother of Achilles according to the ancient Greek mythology.<sup>478</sup> The poem plays with the idea of translation – it appears to translate the word ‘beauty’ from Greek, and the “definitions” refer to motherhood, to the extinction of species and again to motherhood, symbolized by the first (known, placental) mammal with skull and skeleton, Eomaia,<sup>479</sup> who died out – unlike the myths of the Ancient Greek and Christian religion. Thetis, who, as a mythical mother, links the Eomaia and the figure of God as a nurturing, almost motherly presence (God “breastfed” Jacob with ‘honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock,’ as if giving him milk of the mother-Earth, ‘the produce of the field’). Thetis also links

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<sup>476</sup> Fiedorczuk, ‘Ewolucje.’

<sup>477</sup> Deuteronomy 32, ESV, verses 10-13:

But the Lord’s portion is his people,  
Jacob his allotted heritage.

10 “He found him in a desert land,  
and in the howling waste of the wilderness;  
he encircled him, he cared for him,  
he kept him as the apple of his eye.  
11 Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,  
that flutters over its young,  
spreading out its wings, catching them,  
bearing them on its pinions,  
12 the Lord alone guided him,  
no foreign god was with him.  
13 He made him ride on the high places of the land,  
and he ate the produce of the field,  
and he suckled him with honey out of the rock,  
and oil out of the flinty rock.

<<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy+32&version=ESV>> [accessed 10 October 2019]

<sup>478</sup> ‘Thetis,’ in *Encyclopedia Britannica* <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Thetis>> [accessed 20 July 2020]

<sup>479</sup> Quiang Ji, Zhe-Xi Luo, Chong-Xi Yuan, *et al*, ‘The earliest known eutherian mammal,’ *Nature* 416, 816–822 (2002). <<https://doi.org/10.1038/416816a>> [accessed 20 July 2020]

motherhood to the extinction of the species, and landscapes. The Tethys Ocean or Tethys Sea, named after the mythical Nereid, is believed to have existed before the opening of the Indian and Atlantic oceans<sup>480</sup> —an opening of the ancient continents which, in Fiedorczuk's poem, is seen as a closure, as if the new continents were enclosed, encircled by water—, which occurred in the Cretaceous period, the last of the great extinctions.<sup>481</sup> In the poem, science, history, religion, and geology blend to a chorus formed by two simultaneous voices. The shifts or movements across different discourses and fields of knowledge may be compared to a translation or, better yet, to the movement of metaphor. By the power of situating concepts such as 'Tethys', 'Eomaia', 'mommy', 'God' next to each other, Fiedorczuk inflects the meanings of each word, connotations and interpretations blend, they become redefined. As if each concept was refracted through the very coexistence with the alternative metaphors in the same stanza, in the same poem. In the fragments quoted, the symbols or motifs of motherhood, creation, creativity, beauty are transformed, translated, transferred through languages and time. The Sixth Great Extinction is refracted, 'translated' into a story, a set of relatable tropes such as the nurturing and protective figure of a mother so that the memory of the five great extinctions is remembered, and perhaps so that it is not repeated.

Survival and communicability are often linked in Fiedorczuk's texts. In 'Psalm V,' Fiedorczuk touches, yet again, upon the motif of 'natural' and 'artificial' beauty, and reflects on the representation (or 'translation') of both in language:

Piękno istnieje, la ermozura egziste, i raje  
nie są sztuczne, tylko jak mieć wachlarze  
z miłorzębu zielone obok zaraz żółtych i twarze  
ludzkie w słońcu, perły architektury i myśli  
o prochu, którym się stajemy? Dwa dni później  
pamiętam już tylko teorię. Co mówiliśmy  
o matematyce Alhambry i fragmenty wierszy, więc  
rozbieram się szybko, żeby to przyłapać  
na gorącym życiu, żeby się nasycić dobrem  
twego domu pośród pagórków przepasanych  
weselem, gdzie szukam i znajduję, szukam

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<sup>480</sup> Carol Marie Tang, 'Tethys Sea,' *Encyclopaedia Britannica* <<https://www.britannica.com/place/Tethys-Sea>> [accessed 20 July 2020]

<sup>481</sup> Thor Arthur Hansen, 'Cretaceous Period', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* <<https://www.britannica.com/science/Cretaceous-Period>> [accessed 20 July 2020]

i nie znajduję, szukam i znikam, i —<sup>482</sup>

[Beauty exists, la ermozura egziste and paradises | are not artificial, yet how can one have fans | of ginkgo, green right next to yellow, and human | faces in the sunshine, pearls of architecture and thoughts | about the dust that we become? Two days later | I remember only theory, what we said concerning | the mathematics of the Alhambra and the fragments | of poems, so I undress quickly, to catch life | red-handed, to relish the goodness | of your home amid the hills encircled | by a wedding party where I seek and find, seek | and do not find, seek and disappear and — ]<sup>483</sup>

*La ermozura existe*, ‘beauty exists’, is written in Esperanto, thus suggesting the artificial nature of the paradises that are said not to be artificial. Is beauty found in mathematics, in the Alhambra, in ginkgo leaves? Fiedorczuk’s insistence on the accumulative conjunction ‘and’ suggests that these seemingly opposite kinds of beauty — ‘artificial’ and ‘natural,’ symbolic and material— bear no contradiction; in fact, they are linked. Beauty exists in nature and in human artifacts such as linguistic signs and algorithms. The use of an interjection in Esperanto perhaps also suggests the impossibility of communicating beauty,<sup>484</sup> or it could be a gesture of demanding participation from the reader (a foreign word needs to be looked up, and once the readers open their Internet browsers to search for it, maybe they will also look up the ‘mathematics of Alhambra’ or ‘the dust we become,’ perhaps they will think of links between all elements of the poem?) The sudden appearance of a foreign word in a predominantly Polish text, if it is not translated, disrupts communication, as if asking whether such disruptions affect communicability. In other words, the poet seems to ask whether beauty can be translated into language, whether it can survive, and in order to survive in what way it has to be communicated. Survival as the counterbalance to extinction also appears in Marçal’s work, as mentioned previously, most often in the context of preserving the memory of women writers. In the next section, I explore the meaning of survival, preservation and appropriation in theorizing translation, focusing especially on Marçal’s translation of the poetry of Renée Vivien incorporated into the Catalan poet’s novel *La passió segons Renée Vivien*.

<sup>482</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, *Psalm* (Wrocław: Fundacja na rzecz kultury i edukacji im. Tymoteusza Karpowicza, 2017), p. 18.

<sup>483</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, ‘Psalm V,’ trans. by Bill Johnston, *Poetry Foundation*.

<<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/89734/psalm-v>> [accessed 21 April 2020]

<sup>484</sup> It could also be read as a gesture that animates the reader to make an effort and participate in the creation of the poem, by actively looking up the foreign phrase. The effort-based interpretation seems justified if we take into consideration Fiedorczuk’s comments regarding Chinese words in the poems by Ezra Pound, which I discuss further in Chapter Three.

## Beyond that Play of Moving Elements: Translation, Representation, Appropriation

Survival is an important trope in *La passió segons Renée Vivien* ('The Passion According to Renée Vivien,' henceforth *La passió*). *La passió* is a fictional biography – it tells the story of the literary and romantic relationship between Pauline Mary Tarn, a British poet who wrote in French under the *nom de plume* of Renée Vivien, and Natalie Barney, an American-born writer, both of whom moved to Paris by the end of the nineteenth century. One of the main characters is Sara T. – a scriptwriter from Barcelona, researching Vivien's life in order to make a film based on her story.

*La passió* is a collage of stories, memories, and documents assembled to represent the voices of four first person narrators: Sara T., Salomon Reinach, her biographer, and Kerimée, her secret, married lover from Istanbul. There also is a metatextual narrator: the figure of *la narradora*, a she-narrator whose main function is to draw the reader's attention to the structure of the novel and to continually signal and destabilize the testimonies of different characters, each of whom has his or her own version of the life and work of Vivien. Most of the characters whose memories of Vivien are included, such as Mary, Vivien's mother, Baroness van Z. de N.,<sup>485</sup> Colette, Missy, Amédée (Vivien's childhood mentor), Violette (her close friend), and many others, are Vivien's contemporaries. Sara T. and Salomon Reinach take interest in Vivien's work after her death.

The character of Sara T., often referred to as Marçal's alter ego, could symbolize the author-person, or the empirical author, or point to the insufficiency of those theories of reader reception that render the empirical author dispensable in interpreting his or her text. Such is the stance of Umberto Eco, who famously claims that:

A text is a lazy machine that wants its readers to do part of its job, that is, it's a device conceived in order to elicit interpretations [...]. When one has a text to question, it is irrelevant to ask the author. At the same time, the reader cannot give just any interpretation, simply depending on his or her fancy, but must make sure that the text in some way not only legitimizes but also encourages a particular reading.<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> The Baroness also speaks in first person in a letter she writes after Vivien's death to her family, but, for most the part, she is a character whose thoughts are mediated by the main narrator via indirect interior monologue rather than a narrator.

<sup>486</sup> Umberto Eco, *Confessions of a Young Novelist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), eBook, p. 35.

If Sara T. stands for the empirical author, we may say that *la narradora* dialogues, perhaps ironically, with the notion of an implicit author in a text, a ‘purely’ semiotic figure, an organizing mind of the narrative, as described Eco.<sup>487</sup> When the text says, in the introduction: ‘The teller of this tale is unable to draw this introduction to a close without confessing her frankly unexpected feeling of failure,’<sup>488</sup> it is, of course, not the teller of the tale who speaks, but Marçal as an implicit or ‘model author,’ a discursive entity that represents the ‘intention’ of a text to be deciphered ‘correctly’ by the model reader. The empirical reader, on the other hand, does not necessarily have to produce readings that obey the intention of the text – an example that Eco gives is a person watching a comedy film while submerged in the deepest sadness.<sup>489</sup> As a critic uninterested in empirical authors, Eco conceives of the model author as a merely semiotic, bodiless, genderless figure. That is why, for Eco, while the ‘potential hermaphroditism’ of Mona Lisa is an interesting object of aesthetic debate, the sexual preferences of Da Vinci are ‘mere gossip,’ irrelevant to Eco’s reading of Da Vinci’s work.<sup>490</sup> What Eco is expressing is that a text or a work of art should speak for itself, and it *should not be* reduced to the author’s circumstances. What Marçal expresses, on the other hand, is that texts often still *are* reduced to their authors’ circumstances, especially if the authors are women or queer persons. When the organizing mind of Marçal’s novel is thematized as yet another character, *la narradora*, pointing to her gendered specificity, the author is making a playful allusion to those empirical readers who, contrary to all logic, still expected the abstract, ‘universal’ model author to be a ‘he.’

In *La passió*, the figure of the author also acts as the translator – the fragments of Vivien’s diaries or correspondence that Sara T. transcribes appear always already in Catalan. Thus, the symbolic authority of the author in *La passió* is destabilized and questioned from the outset and throughout the text. The result of this multilayered, intertextual, and hybrid composition poses

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<sup>487</sup> This is of course not exclusively Eco’s invention. Eco’s adaptation of the reader reception theory also inspired the work of his contemporaries in different languages, for instance the brilliant Italo Calvino or Georges Perec, not to mention the French new wave cineasts such as Jean-Luc Godard, among many other artists. The idea of a work of art as a matrix that contains places of indetermination to be filled by the reader, listener, or spectator, comes from the German-speaking hermeneuts Wolfgang Iser and Roman Ingarden. Although the reception theory is a result of cross-lingual, transnational theoretical collaboration, it hardly acknowledges the importance of socio-political specificity in the reading encounter, which is, I think, the gap that Marçal points to via the figure of *la narradora*. See: Roman Ingarden, *Ontology of the Work of Art: the Musical Work, the Picture, the Architectural Work, the Film* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989) and Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska, ‘Relacje osobowe w literackiej komunikacji,’ *Problemy teorii literatury* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1987).

<sup>488</sup> Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 9.

<sup>489</sup> Umberto Eco, *Sześć przechadzek po lesie fikcji* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2007), p. 14.

<sup>490</sup> Eco, *Sześć przechadzek*, p. 18.

the question of the possibility of (re)producing queer identity discourses in literature according to the text's intention, situating the literary 'horizon of possibilities' within the politics of representation.

From the first lines of the novel, Marçal's novel underlines the incompleteness of the image and its insufficiency to render the full essence of Vivien. In the introduction, the narrator admits the impossibility of creating a total narrative and compares herself to a photographer, always in need of adjusting the focus, to include ones and exclude others from the picture she creates:

La narradora no sap posar fi a aquesta introducció sense confessar la seva igènua i inesperada sensació de fracàs: com el fotògraf neòfit que hagués intentat de trobar tots els angles i punts d'enfocament d'un paisatge, i al final se sorprengué de tenir a les mans només unes dotzenes de cartrons que deixen a fora allò de més essencial que a ell li sembla saber què és.<sup>491</sup>

The teller of this tale is unable to draw this introduction to a close without confessing her frankly unexpected feeling of failure: like a neophyte photographer who has tried to find all the angles and focal points in a landscape, but is then surprised to have ended up with nothing more in hand than dozens of frames devoid of the most essential element which he think he knows.<sup>492</sup>

The mention of a neophyte photographer could also allude to Julio Cortázar's short story 'Las babas del diablo' (1958; 'The Devil's Drivel'), which provided the basis for Michelangelo Antonioni's film *Blow-Up* (1966). The protagonist of both the story and the motion picture is a male, neophyte photographer who fails to notice (and presumably prevent) a crime, because he forgets that a photograph, even though it promises perfect mimesis, is but a fragment of reality, and the choice of elements to be represented is subjective and variable, which makes the perfect mimesis impossible. This is, of course, also true about literature, as expressed, for example, by Frantz Stanzel in his typological circle, first proposed in 1955.<sup>493</sup> However, unlike Cortázar, Stanzel, or Genette,<sup>494</sup> Marçal pays special attention to political factors, such as gender bias and heteronormativity, which affect the angle from which Vivien's life could be seen.

The role of the narrator to choose the fragments and put them together into a coherent

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<sup>491</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, p. 15.

<sup>492</sup> Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 9.

<sup>493</sup> See: Franz Stanzel, *Narrative Situations in the Novel: Tom Jones, Moby-Dick, The Ambassadors, Ulysses* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1971). For further elaboration of the typological circle theory see: Franz Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, (1984).

<sup>494</sup> Gérard Genette adds further distinctions of Stanzel's typology of narrators and focalizations. See: Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method* (Oxford: Blackwell, [1972] 1980).

narrative is often discussed by Sara T.; it is metaphorized as a dilemma that involves death and survival, or indeed revival, of the object of representation. In her reading of *La passió*, Natasha Tanna describes the poetics of Marçal's novel as 'kaleidoscopic': 'from the Greek kalos "beautiful" and eidos "form," it is a 'process of twisting and rearranging the fragments.'<sup>495</sup> For in Marçal's novel, the main protagonist, Vivien, does not ever speak: her life is rebuilt, reconstructed across time from the surviving pieces – the testimonies of people who once knew her. 'Kaleidoscopic,' an adjective which, for Tanna, 'gives the impression of shifting, mesmerising rearrangements of beautiful fragments [...], also emphasizes the importance of visual images for Vivien,'<sup>496</sup> and the desire of recreating an 'image' or 'reflection' of Vivien by Sara T. The notion of kaleidoscopic composition, as Tanna observes, suggests fortuitous combinations of fragments, it points to the need for the author to accept that some parts of one's work remain beyond the author's control.<sup>497</sup> But a kaleidoscope is also a human-made device, in which the combination of elements (and the resulting beauty) is mathematical rather than coincidental, hence the catch of choice in combining the fragments. Tanna points to the fragment in which Sara T. fantasizes about bringing Vivien back to life: '¿Com donar-te cos, encarnar-te, arrelar-te, fer que la meua sang recorri la teua ombra i, sense substituir-la, la converteixi en vida, en saba, en moviment?'<sup>498</sup> ('How can I give you a body, make you flesh, root you, make my blood run through your shadow and, without taking its place, convert it into life, sap, movement?') Tanna observes that Sara T: 'While envisioning her film about Vivien, her projection of Vivien's life into the future through a "motion picture" [...] Sara. T. strives to feel closer to an "embodied" Vivien.'<sup>499</sup> The revival fantasy also references root and sap, which, according to Tanna, 'indicates the tension between evoking the figure of Viven, but not "fixing" it.'<sup>500</sup> For fixing, freezing, catching or grabbing life inevitably conjures up petrification and death. In order to live on, the image of Vivien needs to move, but it also needs root, it needs sap. The image in Marçal's novel acts, perhaps, as a metaphor to illustrate the utopia of a supranational, cross-lingual communication. As visual expression it does not use language understood as a specific linguistic code, tied to a historical or a national community, it could,

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<sup>495</sup> Tanna, p. 37.

<sup>496</sup> Tanna, p. 39.

<sup>497</sup> Tanna, p. 39.

<sup>498</sup> Maria-Mercè Marçal, *La passió segons Renée Vivien* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1995), p. 91. Translation by Natasha Tanna in: Tanna, *Queer genealogies in transnational Barcelona*, p. 31.

<sup>499</sup> Tanna, p. 44.

<sup>500</sup> Tanna, p. 44.

perhaps, suggest a search for a ‘universal’ translatability of thought.<sup>501</sup> In Marçal’s novel, the story of the life of Renée Vivien is recorded in language, as a description of Sara T.’s investigation; the screenplay itself never appears in the novel (although a draft of it, not incorporated in the novel, can be found in Marçal’s archive.)<sup>502</sup>

In the novel, Sara T. travels to Vivien’s grave and, while contemplating the tombstone, reflects on life, death, and representation or ‘translation’ of her research into a visual code. Order and coherence are an insistent desire for Sara T., who juxtaposes cohesion with movement:

A partir d’un reflex que serpeja aigua endins, on m’és més fàcil de destriar només els traços que em retornen la meua imatge, deformada (com en els miralls de fira), de quina manera redreçar-te a tu, més enllà d’aquest joc d’encaixos, de peces movedisses.<sup>503</sup>

[From a reflex that twists into the water is where it is easiest for me to pinpoint traces, and only traces, which return my own, deformed image (like in carnival mirrors), how can I straighten you, beyond that play of moving elements, of matching fragments.]

In her analysis of the concept of genealogy in Marçal’s novel, Tanna paid special attention, in the above fragment to the word *redreçar*. For Tanna, the word *redreçar* expresses Sara T.’s need for order or cohesion that would ‘make Vivien’s life cohere into a comprehensible narrative.’<sup>504</sup> But the choice of words, as Tanna notes, is interesting indeed: *redreçar* means, among other things, ‘to straighten.’ Sara T. feels an overwhelming desire to ‘tame the “wild” fragments that hint at how Vivien lived and interacted with those around her.’<sup>505</sup> In order to finish her script, she needs to make the lesbian poet’s life and oeuvre, paradoxically, more “straight”: orderly, coherent, unambiguous, more communicable. Sara T. is striving to order a complex and abstruse archive of images, words and memories in order to distil, ostensibly, the “essence” of Vivien, to depict her “particularity,” to preserve her from the ‘death’ of oblivion. But, when looking for a “pure” or “clear” mirror image of Vivien, Sara T. can only see her own reflection, refracted by the moving waters of a puddle next to the grave. As we can see, the anxiety of not letting one’s own reflection, one’s own conditioning conceal the image of another writer was very present in

<sup>501</sup> On the other hand, as Rhiannon McGlade proves via multiple examples of Catalan, political comics, images do not always communicate ‘outside’ or ‘beyond’ linguistic specificity, as images are also culturally specific and many of Catalan political comics are based on language-specific puns. See: Rhiannon McGlade, *Catalan Cartoons: a Cultural and Political History* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016).

<sup>502</sup> FMMM, box 8, file 6.

<sup>503</sup> Maria-Mercè Marçal, *La passió segons Renée Vivien* (Barcelona: Columna), p. 91.

<sup>504</sup> Tanna, p. 46.

<sup>505</sup> Tanna, p. 46.



Marçal's work. This dilemma is also relevant for the critics of Marçal's practice as a translator, as her translation techniques have often been described as appropriative, as if reflecting Marçal's perception of Vivien rather than the formal traits of Vivien's poems.

There are examples of translations in the novel that seem to be focused on preserving as many formal features of the original as possible. In one of her letters, Sara T. uses a fragment from Vivien's novel *Une femme m'apparut* ('A Woman Appeared To Me') to write to her friend about Vivien's fear of maternity and of the deformation of her body. Vivien's verses 'les seins, qu'ont ravagé les maternités lourdes, | Ont la difformité des outres et des gourdes'<sup>506</sup> ('the breasts, ravaged by heavy maternities, | Have the deformity of wineskins and gourds') are inserted, already in translation, into Sara T.'s letter to a friend, where they are rendered as 'maternitats feixugues que els pits han devastat | — són com bots i carbasses en llur deformitat'<sup>507</sup> ('heavy maternities which devastated the breasts | — resemble wineskins and pumpkins in their deformity.'). As we have seen, and as Caterina Riba observes, Marçal prioritizes musicality in her translation, reproducing a similar syllabic count and rhyme.<sup>508</sup> To preserve the alexandrine, she places *maternitats* (maternities) at the beginning of the verse and reduces the syllable count. In the second verse, she substitutes *outrés* ('goatskins, wineskins') and *gourdes* ('flasks'), two kinds of vessels used to carry water or wine with *bot* ('wineskin') and *carbasses* ('pumpkins'), which allude to the heaviness of a woman's breasts when breastfeeding and which here evoke a sense of physical deformity. While *bot* is an exact equivalent of *outré*, the *carbassa*, a heavy and thick fruit, alludes to heaviness.<sup>509</sup> Thus, Marçal preserves the sense of heaviness in the poem, as well as the image of an animal's skin—the woman's skin—as a vessel.<sup>510</sup> However, in other instances, the formal features of Vivien's translated poems have been significantly altered.

In an article on Marçal, Dolors Udina provides detailed comments on Marçal's domesticating procedures in translating Renée Vivien's poem 'Je pleure sur Toi' ('I cry over you'), which Marçal includes in her novel. As Udina observes, in Marçal's version, 'Ploro per tu,' expressions were rephrased, domesticated or '*anostrats*' ('made ours') and a whole stanza

<sup>506</sup> Caterina Riba Sanmartí, 'Maria-Mercè Marçal, tradició/traducció/creació,' *Estudis Romànics* (Institut d'Estudis Catalans), Vol. 37 (2015), p. 473.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid.

erased – according to Udina, in order to ‘cleanse’ the poem of the exuberant Parnassian imagery and thus make it more ‘contemporary.’<sup>511</sup> In the translation of the poem Marçal does not reproduce either the original division into stanzas or the rhymes.<sup>512</sup> Udina attributes Marçal’s translation strategies to the fact that translation never reflected Marçal’s primary identity.<sup>513</sup> This is of course true, however, it should also be noted that Marçal’s translations of Vivien are published as part of a novel, not as a translation, and so they too are subject to the same process of authorial choice as elements of Vivien’s life.

It is worth taking into account that Marçal is translating from French, a well-established language in the literary canon, into the minoritized Catalan, which in some ways contradicts the conviction held in the past by many of the Catalan poet-translators that Catalan needs translation in order to ‘learn’ from other literatures, to fill in the gaps between the medieval and the modern literary uses of the language that were created in the ‘*decadència*’ period. Maragall, for instance, saw in translation a hope to renew nineteenth century Catalan after a long period of *Decadència*. Catalan, for Maragall, remained ‘sin cultivo literario y abandonada, por tanto, al rebajamiento de los usos vulgares’<sup>514</sup> (‘without literary cultivation and therefore abandoned to the degradation of the vulgar forms.’) Maragall saw translations as an important source of innovation for the long impoverished Catalan literary tradition after ages of diglossia. According to Maragall,

el treball de traducció, quan és fet amb calor artístic, suggereix formes noves; fa descobrir riqueses de l’idioma desconegudes, li dóna tremp i flexibilitat [...] i en gran part li supleix la falta d’una tradició literària pròpia i seguida.

[the task of translation, when it is done with artistic ardour, suggests new forms; it makes us discover the previously unknown richness of the language, it provides it with flexibility and strength [...], in many cases it also fulfils the lack of a continuous literary tradition.<sup>515</sup>

Similarly, Carles Riba declared that ‘Violentament interrompuda la seva tradició gloriosa, ens hem trobat amb una paradoxa incitant dins la nostra parla: vella i culta d’anys, però primitiva en

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<sup>511</sup> Dolors Udina, ‘L’altra mirada que perfà la pròpia. Sobre les traduccions de Maria Mercè Marçal,’ *Reduccions*, vol. 89-90 (Vic, 2008), p. 215.

<sup>512</sup> Udina, p. 215.

<sup>513</sup> Udina, p. 208.

<sup>514</sup> Joan Maragall, *Obres completes II* (Barcelona: Selecta, 1901), pp. 165-166. Quoted in: Jordi Malé, “Una llengua en plena ebullició”. Els traductors davant el català literari a les primeres dècades del segle XX’, in *Quaderns. Rev. trad.*, 14, 2007, p. 81.

<sup>515</sup> Joan Maragall, ‘El catalanisme en el llenguatge’, Joan Maragall, *Obres completes I* (Barcelona: Selecta, 1981), p. 789. Quoted in: Malé, “Una llengua en plena ebullició”, p. 81.

els recursos, com si s'hagués desaprofita a si mateixa'<sup>516</sup> ('[w]ith the glorious tradition of our tongue violently interrupted, we are facing an incipient paradox: [our language is] old and [was] cultivated for years, yet it is primitive in its resources, as if it had unlearned itself.')

The perception of Catalan as a language in need of literary references at an international level is reminiscent of Itamar Even-Zohar's theorization of the 'position of translated literatures within the literary polysystems,' with certain reservations. In a polysystem approach to literature, literatures are viewed as complex, mutually entangled systems of dialogues and influences; what is more, translated literature is 'not only seen as an integral system within any literary polysystem, but [...] the most active system within it.'<sup>517</sup> According to Even-Zohar, 'Since a young literature cannot immediately create texts in all types known to its producers, it benefits from the experience of other literatures, and translated literature becomes in this way one of its most important systems.'<sup>518</sup> But the notion of 'young literatures,' certainly inappropriate in the context of Catalan, is not the only factor that, according to Even-Zohar, influences the transfer of literary tendencies across languages and literatures. For Even-Zohar, a literary system also needs translation when 'a literature is either "peripheral" (within a large group of correlated literatures) [...] and when there are turning points, crises, or literary vacuums in a literature.'<sup>519</sup> Maragall and Riba, along with many others,<sup>520</sup> coincided in treating the period of *Decadència* as a gap or 'vacuum' in the development of Catalan literature that needed to be 'filled in' with international input. What is more, as Helena Buffery observes, translation became a 'means of internationalization.' Translating into Catalan intended to distinguish the Catalan language and culture 'from the more inward-looking attitude associated at the time by Catalan intellectuals with Castilian centralism.'<sup>521</sup> If we follow Even-Zohar's typology of literatures, we should, as a result, expect that, in Catalan, translated literature would provide 'features (both principles and

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<sup>516</sup> Carles Riba, 'Designi del traductor'. *Histories extraordinaries d'Edgar A. Poe*, transl. by Carles Riba (Barcelona: Societat Catalana d'Edicions, 1915), pp. 5-6. Quoted in: Malé, 'Una llengua en plena ebullició', p. 81.

<sup>517</sup> Itamar Even-Zohar, 'The Position Of Translated Literature Within The Literary Polysystems', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti, Mona Baker (London/ New York: Routledge, 1978 [revised 1990]), p. 193.

<sup>518</sup> Even-Zohar, 'The Position Of Translated Literature Within The Literary Polysystems', p. 194.

<sup>519</sup> Even-Zohar, 'The Position Of Translated Literature Within The Literary Polysystems', pp. 193-194.

<sup>520</sup> An especially interesting example of internationalization are the translations of Shakespeare into Catalan, discussed by Helena Buffery. See: Helena Buffery, *Shakespeare in Catalan: Translating Imperialism* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

<sup>521</sup> Helena Buffery, 'Iberian Identity in the Translation Zone,' in S. Pérez Isasi, A. Fernande (eds.), *Looking at Iberia: A Comparative European Perspective* (Bern: Peter Land, 2013), p. 253.

elements) [...] introduced into the home literature which did not exist there before.’<sup>522</sup> The position of translated literature within the literary system, as described by Even-Zohar, also affects the choice of translation strategies:

the translator’s main concern here is not just to look for ready-made models in his home repertoire into which the source texts would be transferable. Instead, he is prepared in such cases to violate the home conventions. Under such conditions the chances that the translation will be close to the original in terms of adequacy [...] are greater than otherwise.<sup>523</sup>

It is telling that Marçal’s translations are from French and Russian into Catalan. By the very direction of Marçal’s translation, the poet problematizes what Itamar Even-Zohar referred to as ‘the long traditional central position of French literature within the European context (or within the European macro-polysystem).’<sup>524</sup> Marçal is translating a fairly unknown, lesbian writer from French, from a literature that would otherwise be considered “central” into the “peripheral” Catalan,<sup>525</sup> thus nuancing both the monolithic understanding of ‘centrality’ and ‘peripherality.’ On the other hand, she is translating her “unfaithfully.” The omission of Parnassian (and also Symbolist) influences in ‘Ploro per tu,’ seems to be a strategy used throughout the novel.<sup>526</sup> Marçal is allowing herself to ‘correct’ or domesticate not all of Vivien’s writing, but only the influence of the French poets of the end of the century such as Albert-Alexandre Glatigny, Théodore de Banville, François Coppée, Léon Dierx, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, or Arthur Rimbaud, all of them considered canonic. Perhaps, by translating Vivien in a partially ‘uprooting’ way, as postulated in Marçal’s Dublin speech on translation, the Catalan poet intends to move Vivien out of the context of those big names, in order for the reader to focus on other things that the French poet had to say about womanhood, lesbian love, inequality, and writing, rather than allow for her to be read via the legacy of her male colleagues.

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<sup>522</sup> Even-Zohar, ‘The Position Of Translated Literature Within The Literary Polysystems,’ p. 193.

<sup>523</sup> Even-Zohar, ‘The Position Of Translated Literature Within The Literary Polysystems,’ p. 196.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

<sup>525</sup> For the detailed description of the central versus peripheral literary polysystems see: Even-Zohar, ‘The Position Of Translated Literature Within The Literary Polysystems.’ See also: Gideon Toury, ‘The Nature And Role Of Norms In Translation’ in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti, Mona Baker (London/ New York: Routledge, 1978 [revised 1990]), where the author makes a case for descriptive translation studies, focusing especially on the role of translation in cultural history. The contribution of Marçal to Even-Zohar’s brilliant specification of the complex power relationships within the European literary canons consists in enriching the language-specific or geopolitical perspective in constructing the canons with the importance of gender and sexuality as a potential site of trans-national dialogues.

<sup>526</sup> I would like to thank Helena Buffery for drawing my attention to this.

Moreover, if we accept Even-Zohar's theorization of literary polysystems, we are still leaving out other issues of (non)-representation, such as the relative invisibility of women and queer writers. Given the marginal status of Catalan in the international publishing market, Marçal's translation choices bring the readers' attention to issues of multiple minoritization which, according to Josep-Anton Fernàndez,<sup>527</sup> have made it difficult, until very recently, to publish narratives about marginalized communities (for Fernàndez, the LGBTQ community) in the already minoritized Catalan language. In short, Marçal's preference for fluency, by way of a 'free' and a 'creative' rather than a 'faithful' translation, reorganizes the common perceptions of peripherality and centrality, disturbing their tight, binary configuration, and seems to follow a decidedly anti-imperialistic agenda. Venuti mentions the 'irreducible heterogeneity of linguistic and cultural situations' on which translation is premised.<sup>528</sup> Similarly, Marçal understands translation not in binary terms —as a transfer from one language to another— but rather as a complex procedure which involves reassembling the already heterogenous sets of references, linguistic and other, in both the source and the target texts.

When exploring their conception of a 'minor literature,' Deleuze and Guattari relate the concept to the breaking of form. They assert that '[e]xpression must break forms, encourage ruptures and new sproutings. When a form is broken, one must reconstruct the content that will necessarily be part of a rupture in the order of things.'<sup>529</sup> This breaking of form is not only expressed by the fragmented structure of the novel; the text is also filled with structural metaphors of obliqueness. For Wittig, '[a]ll minority writers (who are conscious of being so) enter into literature obliquely.'<sup>530</sup> The queerness of the topic, for Wittig, is often linked with an oblique, fractured, estranging narrative:

The minority subject is not self-centered as is the straight subject. Its extension into space could be described as being like Pascal's circle, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. This is what explains Djuna Barnes' angle of approach to her text — a constant shifting which, when the text is read, produces an effect comparable to what I call an out-of-the-corner-of-the-eye perception; the text works through fracturing.

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<sup>527</sup> See: Josep-Anton Fernàndez, *Another country: sexuality and national identity in Catalan gay fiction* (Leeds: Maney for the Mordern Humanities Research Association, 2000).

<sup>528</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation. Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London, New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 9.

<sup>529</sup> Deleuze, Guattari, 'Kafka, Toward A Minor Literature', p 28.

<sup>530</sup> Wittig, 'Point of view: Universal or Particular?', p. 65.

Word by word, the text bears the mark of that estrangement which Barnes describes with each of her characters.<sup>531</sup>

Wittig's text was, in fact, written as a result of a translation – she conceived of it while translating Barnes' *Spillway*, which is the subject of Wittig's essay. But the reflections on the novel by Barnes may well be applied to Marçal's *La passió*. The 'out-of-the-corner-of-the-eye perception,' in *La passió* becomes the gaze of the narrator projected onto the characters, which Marçal describes as moderately squinted:

'Fa cinc anys em van caure a les mans uns versos d'una fosca bellesa,' diu Sara T. I la narradora la deixa en aquest punt per projectar la seva mirada moderadament estràbica i a voltes sardònica sobre els altres personatges que la reclamen.<sup>532</sup>

[‘Five years ago I stumbled upon verses of a dark beauty,’ says Sara T. And the teller of this tale leaves her at this moment in order to cast her somewhat squinting and at times sardonic gaze on other characters that beckon her attention.]<sup>533</sup>

The narrator's look, distanced, indirect in that it is confessedly 'projected' is also oblique, squinting, anything but 'centered', 'straight' or 'straight-forward.' The representation of sexual dissidence, although not always focused on non-normative or minor uses of the Catalan language, does participate in shaping poetic signification in Catalan. In this sense, Marçal's interest in Vivien could also be defined as seeking the 'minor' within the 'major' language. Just as Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari speak of 'those literatures that are considered minor,'<sup>534</sup> the example of which could be 'the Jewish literature of Warsaw and Prague,' Marçal seems to point to the 'lesbian literature of Paris.' For Deleuze and Guattari, a minor literature 'doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language.'<sup>535</sup> But to Marçal, the definition of minority exceeds what may be defined as an ethnic or a national minority. The speech of the minoritized becomes, as if, a language of its own, within an already existing language. In the novel, Marçal additionally complicates the notions of translation and multilingualism by amply employing what Bakhtin referred to heteroglossia: a multiplicity of 'languages' within a language, for example the highly colloquial language of the courtesans of

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

<sup>532</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>533</sup> Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 8.

<sup>534</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. by Dana Polan (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, c1986), p. 16.

<sup>535</sup> Deleuze, Guattari, 'Kafka, Toward A Minor Literature', p 16.

Moulin Rouge, filled with popular references and sayings, the colloquial yet normative language of Sara T.'s letters, or the highly literary and florid narration in the fragments dedicated to Amadée, or the spoken language of the inexistent diary of Vivien's chambermaid. What is more, not all 'documents' that appear in the plot are Catalan versions of actually existing French originals. The novel contains translated fragments of Vivien's letters, but it also contains writings that are works of fiction. While we may expect that the 'diary' of Vivien's supposed Turkish lover, Kerimée, has never existed, the fragments of diary written by Vivien's chambermaid are openly described by *la narradora* as 'el rastre evanescent del diari mai no escrit d'una antiga cambrera'<sup>536</sup> ('the evanescent trail of the never-written journal of a former chambermaid.')<sup>537</sup> In playing with the idea of a translational hoax, Marçal is most probably alluding to the famous case of forgery of Vivien's times, skillfully analyzed by Emily Apter in 'Translation with No Original: Scandals of Textual Reproduction,' namely Pierre Louÿs's *Les Chansons de Bilitis* ('Songs of Bilitis,' 1894), subtitled 'traduites du grec pour la première fois par P.L.' ('translated from the Greek for the first time by P.L.') that were disguised as the translation of poems by a sixth-century Greek-Turkish woman poet. The success of the fraudulent translation, according to Apter,

was helped along by the vogue of Greek revivalism in fin-de-siècle erotic literature. The work's reception was buoyed by the reading public's keen appetite for Baudelairean Lesbos and Parnassian pastoral love poetry. The same appetite was responsible for the later popularity of Natalie Clifford Barney's 1902 *Cinq Petits Dialogues grecs* [Five Short Greek Dialogues] and Renée Vivien's free translations of Sappho that appeared in 1903. Anticipating Rémy de Gourmont and Natalie Clifford Barney's reinvestment of the Amazon myth, and André Gide's appropriation of Platonic dialogue for gay polemic in *Corydon*, Louÿs placed utopian sexual politics at the heart of his agenda in using Greek conceits to express feminine same-sex love.<sup>538</sup>

As we find out from Apter, Louÿs's intention was to 'rescue' the perceptions of lesbianism from the false accusations of promiscuity. Instead, he decided, not less scandalously that a lesbian relationship should be represented as an impaired echo of a repressed 'mother's instinct.'<sup>539</sup>

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<sup>536</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, p. 345.

<sup>537</sup> Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 304.

<sup>538</sup> Emily Apter, 'Translation with No Original: Scandals of Textual Reproduction,' in: *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, ed. by Sandra Bermann, Michael Wood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), eBook, p. 180. <<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/lib/cam/detail.action?docID=537648>> [accessed 11 June 2021]

<sup>539</sup> Ibid.

Ironically, the interest in recuperating same-sex love narratives from below the layers of history, oblivion and heterosexual-washing, also cultivated by Vivien and Barney, was part of the same tendency that gave rise to one of the most blatant cases of pseudotranslation. By introducing the motif of inexistent originals into the novel, Marçal seems to point to what Apter refers to as the

epistemological scam or faked-up alterity inherent in all translation. The translation business is geared to keeping this scam from view, for it wants to convince readers that when it markets an author in translation, the translated text will be a truly serviceable stand-in for the original; affording a genuine translinguistic encounter with a foreign literature in the language of self-same.<sup>540</sup>

But, as I will argue more broadly in Chapter Five, Marçal renders the specter of such ‘genuine translinguistic encounter’ as partially utopian, as it remains haunted by the projections of the translator, or reader, onto the foreign text, just like Louÿs’ rendering of lesbian desire turned out a mere projection of the authors’ gaze onto an imagined figure of ‘deformed’ femininity.

In this section, I have reflected on the meaning of appropriation and its relationship to the preservation of an author’s ‘voice’ in Marçal’s translations of Vivien. I have claimed that the relationship between the texts shall be seen not only in terms of the translation strategies that are used, but also in terms of the reasons why they may have been used, what importance these strategies may have in a larger context of linguistic and cultural hierarchies that define both texts. Moreover, I pointed to different meanings of ‘major’ and ‘minor’ literature, i.e. to the importance of multiple minoritization when assessing refractions of meaning in a translation. In the next section, I take a look at specific examples of refractions in a fragment of Marçal’s translation of Tsvetaeva. The fragment in question concerns stereotyped representations of Jewishness and errancy, Tsvetaeva alluded to and Marçal in her novel.

### **All Poets Are Jews? Wandering Intellectuals and Transnational Alliances**

In her conversations with Zgustova, Marçal is especially moved by metaphors of exclusion and signs of political oppression suffered by both Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova. Zgustova recalls her conversations with Marçal as follows:

Em parla de l’hostilitat, per part de la premsa oficial soviètica envers les dues poetes, de l’exili interior i exterior que van viure totes dues —l’una, Anna Akhmàtova, dins el seu país; l’altra, Marina Tsvetàieva, a l’estranger. [...] Maria-Mercè parla del tema del jueu

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<sup>540</sup> Apter, ‘Translation with No Original,’ p. 184.



errant, del jueu com a víctima dels pogroms, del jueu com l'estrany i l'estranger, i del tema del poeta com a jueu, que Marina va fer seu i, amb ella, Maria-Mercè mateixa.<sup>541</sup>

[She talks about the hostility of the Soviet press towards both poets, about the internal and external exile that both of them suffered —Anna Akhmatova within her own country and Marina Tsvetaeva abroad—. Maria-Mercè talks about the topic of the wandering Jew, of the Jew-victim of pogroms, about the Jew as a stranger and a foreigner, she talks about the poet as Jew —a topic that Marina, and with her Maria-Mercè, appropriated.]

The attentiveness towards various forms of oppression shows up in Marçal's understanding of the task of a translator. In the above fragment, Marçal talks about gender, exile, symbolic exclusion or minoritization, as she points to the impact of Stalinist terror on both writer's poetic voices. In this section, my primary focus is on Marçal's rendering of the poet-Jew as well as the Wandering Jew figures, in comparison to the translations of Tsvetaeva by Mary Jane White. The figure of the Jew travels from Tsvetaeva's 'Poem of the End' to Marçal's own literary production, undergoing multiple refractions.

In Tsvetaeva's poetry, Marçal pays special attention to the symbolically and historically charged image of the Jew as both a victim and a survivor of marginalization. The motif of the Wandering Jew, of the Jewish community as 'uprooted' has long history in European literature. The figure gains popularity in the Middle Ages, it then comes back in the nineteenth century, most notably in Eugène Sue's *Le juif errant* (1844), a clear representation of antisemitic metaphors of impurity, illness and contagion (in the novel, the cholera epidemics follows the 'wandering Jew' everywhere he goes.) The figure is re-signified, to a certain extent, by the Dreyfus affair, and acquires another allegorical dimension, linked to the Diaspora and to the increasingly "stateless" status of Jews in Germany and elsewhere. Tsvetaeva's comparison between poets and Jews could also have been an ironic comment against the use of the 'Jewish menace' as an argument against cosmopolitanism. (As Epps observes, Maurice Barrés used the motif of an errant intellectual who embraces foreign influences as a threatening allusion to the presupposed uprootedness of the Jews; true patriotism, for Barrés was to avoid any suspicion of foreign influence.)<sup>542</sup> In her reading, Marçal does not engage critically with the historical circumstances of any particular Jewish minority, nor does she touch upon the topic of any specific forms of persecution. Instead, she appropriates the metaphors of minoritization in a (somewhat ahistorical) gesture of solidarity, as if anchoring her interpretation of the poems in the

<sup>541</sup> Akhmatova, Tsvietàieva, *Poema de la fi i altres poemes*, pp. 10-12.

<sup>542</sup> Epps, 'Before Postnationalism,' p. 141.

experience of othering and state-approved discrimination of women, lesbians, or ‘public enemies’ targeted by totalitarian regimes. On some occasions, Marçal’s interest in minoritization has led the Catalan poet to appropriate and refract Tsvetaeva’s ‘Wandering Jew.’

If Marina Tsvetaeva compares the marginalization of poets to that of Jewish minorities, Marçal extends the metaphor of marginalization to questions of estrangement, migration, errancy, queerness, orphanhood, and, ultimately, foreignness and exclusion. Marçal transforms and reappropriates the figure of the Jew as represented by Tsvetaeva, through refraction and reassembling of meanings. Let us look at Marçal’s versions of Tsvetaeva’s ‘Poem Of The End,’ which may shed some light on the ways in which the Catalan poet perceived the figure of the Jew as one of the key symbols in Tsvetaeva, which Marçal refracts. In Section 12 of Marçal’s translation of the poem we read the following:

No és més digne d’esdevenir  
 Jueu errant? Perquè, als ulls  
 De qui no sigui el més gran cretí,  
 El po- grom jueu – de segur –  
 És la vida. Viu dels renegats!  
 Dels nous conversos devots!  
 Abans l’infern – les illes letals  
 Dels leprosos! No, però,  
 La vida – que als renegats s’ofrena  
 – L’ovella a mans de botxí!  
 El dret a carnet de residència,  
 El trepitjo – lluny de mi!

This part of the translation is relatively close to the way the poem was translated into English by Mary Jane White.<sup>543</sup> We can see that both translators include the mid-word hyphens, thus producing a defamiliarizing effect in the line on the pogroms, each deciding to opt for a different word – ‘Jew-ish’ in English and ‘po-grom’ in Catalan. In White’s version the first part of the stanza reads as follows: ‘Wouldn’t it be a hundred times more | Worthy to be a Wandering Jew? | Since for anyone who is not vile | Life is a Jew-ish pogrom, —’

As opposed to Marçal, White does not divide the last verse of the first stanza into two stanzas. When it comes to metaphors, White decides to employ the phrasing of ‘Judases of

<sup>543</sup> Marina Tsvetaeva, ‘Poem of the End’, trans. by Mary Jane White, *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 61, No. 4, Translation Issue (Winter 2009), pp. 695-715 (The Hudson Review, Inc.) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25650670>> [accessed 11 June 2019]

every faith,’ which in Marçal is omitted. The word ‘converts,’ *Búxpecmu*<sup>544</sup> refers to the obsolete, it is a colloquial and negative expression. *Búxpecmu* may be read as a condemnation of those who convert, ‘Judases of every faith’, as opposed to those who “chose” death and exile. Marçal renders this additional, negative meaning of the word *Búxpecmu* via the expressions *nous conversos* and *renegats*, while White opts for ‘converts’ only, potentially because Tsvetaeva’s sarcastic “criticism” of the Jews is reiterated later in the poem, in another reference to Judas, which White includes (and Marçal conceals):

Life. Only converts survive! | Judases of every faith? | On to the leper colonies! | On to hell! – beyond the Pale! – not back into | Life – where only converts survive, only | Sheep – go to slaughter! | Underfoot, I trample | My perm-it to live here!<sup>545</sup>

In the poem, the poetic ‘I,’ while going through a traumatic separation from the man she loved, a separation that she refuses to accept, experiences a feeling of identification with the Jews and the lepers exiled from the cities, as she wanders around Prague with her lover, passing by the city walls. Although not Jewish herself, Tsvetaeva was an émigré in Czechoslovakia and Paris. The above passage could, perhaps, be read as a refusal to stay abroad, detached from her land, and obeying the totalitarian laws that led to the execution of her former husband Sergei Efron (a soldier in the White Army, of Jewish origin) and her exile. Tsvetaeva’s painful sarcasm and the denial to “choose” between abjection and exile becomes all the more evident in the final line in which the poetic ‘I’ refuses the permit to live ‘here,’ outside, conditioned by the terror and unable to go back.

Both in Marçal’s and White’s interpretation, Tsvetaeva’s original irony or bitterness was preserved, in different ways, without attempts to attenuate or explain it. The figure of the island on which the leper colonies are exiled is kept by both White and Marçal as an alternative metaphor of exclusion. The metaphorization of internal exile become quite different, however, in the last stanza of section twelve. In Marçal’s translation: ‘Gueto d’élites! Cap al forat! | Sense cap compadiment! | En aquest món hipercristià | Els poetes són jueus!’ The stanza, according to White, sounds as follows: ‘Ghetto of God’s chosen! A divide | And a ditch. Ex-pect no mercy! | In this most Christian of worlds | All poets – are Jews!’<sup>546</sup> What Tsvetaeva expressed as a ‘ghetto

<sup>544</sup> I owe the explanation of the nuances of the original poem to Ivan Kozachenko who kindly provided me with numerous comments on the meaning of the original words.

<sup>545</sup> Tsvetaeva, ‘Poem of the End,’ p. 713.

<sup>546</sup> Tsvetaeva, ‘Poem of the End,’ p. 713.

of the Chosen,<sup>547</sup> or of those who choose, is rendered by Marçal as a ‘ghetto of elites,’ refraction that, although it may seem insignificant, will return in Marçal’s novel, influencing her interpretation of some of the Jewish characters in nineteenth-century Paris.

In Tsvetaeva’s poem, the last line does not contain a verb, it only reads ‘Poets – Jews’; both Marçal and White opted for an explanatory procedure of converting it into a complete, or completed, fluent sentence. While ‘the God’s chosen’ in Tsvetaeva most probably refers to the Biblical myth, to the descendants of the Israelites as chosen by God, a religious, historical or mythical privilege which does not necessarily translate into social inclusion, Marçal’s translation, *élites*, especially when juxtaposed with ‘gueto,’ connotes a social privilege that is simultaneous to exclusion. Marçal may have understood the poem in Tsvetaeva’s biographical context of a poet in exile, with the reference to a traditionally privileged status of a poet contrasted with the precariousness of Tsvetaeva’s exile. Such a reading would make it possible to understand the explanatory verb and the noun *élites* in Marçal’s translation of the figure of the poet, although not necessarily the immediate proximity of ‘elites’ with the figure of the Jew. This transposition of meaning from Marçal’s interpretation of Tsvetaeva is typical of the functioning of literary refractions in Marçal.

Guided by Marçal’s literary paths, we have traveled from Russia back to *fin de siècle* Paris and Vivien. In *La Passió*, Marçal returns to the metaphor of writing as exile when describing the character of Baroness Hélène van Zuylen, a member of the Rothschild banking family in France, a lover of Pauline M. Tarn and wife of the Dutch aristocrat Baron Étienne van Zuylen. The narrator describes the sense of belonging of the Baroness to her Jewish lineage in the following terms: ‘La pertinença d’Hélène a la raça alhora privilegiada i execrada, cosmopolita i sense pàtria, havia suscitat en Pauline la visió d’un paral·lelisme amb la sort comuna dels poetes: l’exili.’<sup>548</sup> (‘Hélène’s belonging to a race at once privileged and abominated, cosmopolitan and without homeland, had aroused in Pauline a vision of parallelism with the common lot of poets: exile.’)<sup>549</sup> Marçal interprets the Baroness through Tsvetaeva, but also via the stereotyped metaphor of Jewishness as tied to errancy, cosmopolitanism, and elitism. According to the narrator, the Baroness and Vivien shared a bond that was further strengthened

<sup>547</sup> I would like to thank Ivan Kozachenko again for drawing my attention to the original meaning in Tsvetaeva.

<sup>548</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, p. 67.

<sup>549</sup> Maria-Mercè Marçal, *The Passion according to Renée Vivien*, transl. by Kathleen McNerney and Helena Buffery (London: Francis Boutle Publishers, 2020), p. 68.

due to van Zuylen's Jewish heritage which Vivien was to perceive as a "race." The state of exile portrayed as a foundation for the sense of kinship between the two women is, as Natasha Tanna puts it, 'considered a privilege akin to that of writing,'<sup>550</sup> but also founded on a shared feeling of oppression. The word "race" in this context, problematic if understood literally—as a belief in the existence of sets of biological or genetic traits tied to skin color—reflects the usage of the time. In Marçal, it could also be seen as a metaphor, similarly to the way the word "race" was employed by Montserrat Jufresa to comment on the representation of women in Marçal and Nicole Loraux, as an oppressed category of people.<sup>551</sup> The category of 'women,' as constructed as that of 'race' is thus underlined in its constructedness, in its function of a tool to divide, define, categorize and other.

To place the word 'ghetto' right next to 'elite' in the novel seems unsettling, and so does the choice of Baroness van Zuylen, with her banking connections, as an iconic figure of a 'privileged Jew.' Regarding stereotypes, one might ask in what way the word "Jew" is understood or metaphorized by both poets. Without any context, the motif of the "Wandering Jew" risks repeating the established discourses of Jewish otherness, uprootedness and cosmopolitan lack of belonging. Are Tsvetaeva's the Russian Jews, the Czechoslovakian Jews? What would that mean? If, as a metaphor, 'Jew' was used to indicate exclusion, the metaphor would certainly function differently depending on the space and time (for example, the status of Jews was different in Austro-Hungary than in pre-War Poland or Soviet Ukraine). In other words, the relationship of the "Jew" as a metaphor (but also as a stereotype) to the social exclusion of Jews is complex to generalize about, but even more so the relationship of the Jews to privilege, which is the metaphorical dimension added by Marçal. It seems interesting to speculate "what" Jewish community it refers to. Are they Ashkenazi or Sephardic Jews? Is it possible that those associations with the word Jew, then, work differently in Tsvetaeva's poem and in Marçal's translation? When reading the word "Jew", would Russian readers be more likely to picture, say, Ashkenazi Jews, while Marçal's readers might have more Sephardic associations? Or does the reference to a specific religious or cultural community remain irrelevant to both writers, serving mostly to metaphorize a transnational community per se, a community linked by shared values or identity traits while at the same time different depending

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<sup>550</sup> Tanna, p. 12.

<sup>551</sup> Montserrat Jufresa, 'L'escriptura de l'Erínia,' in *Clàssics en Maria Àngels Anglada i Maria-Mercè Marçal*, (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2011) p. 93.

on the territory? This last hypothesis brings us closer to the ways in which Marçal metaphorizes gender and sexual dissidence as foreignness in *La passió*, drawing on the idea of a potential, trans-national connection that links all queer characters. In the next chapter, I explore Marçal's metaphorical uses of foreignness to refer to queerness.

In this chapter, I have summarized briefly Marçal's and Fiedorczuk's thoughts on translation in the context of refractions of meaning, as well as analyzed a refracted translation by both authors of a literary motif related to race. I believe that both Marçal and Fiedorczuk see the future of translation as part of wider array of interconnected debates regarding human rights and ecology, hospitality and exclusion. In their writings they also use language, translation, communicability, and foreignness as metaphors to think of other issues of (non)representation such as portraying non-normative expressions of gender, sexuality, and non-human languages. The next chapter is devoted to those wider social and ecological issues in Fiedorczuk's and Marçal's texts.

## Chapter Four: Translation as Metaphor

### Transnational, Transgender, Transcendental: Foreignness, Sexuality and Genesis in *La passió*

In her reading of Vivien, Marçal addresses socially repressed and condemned lesbian desire through which, as I will argue, she broadens and complicates the relationships between the foreign and the native. Marçal's reading of Pauline Mary Tarn's, or Renée Vivien's, task as a writer, in the essay 'Renée Vivien, Safo 1900,' begins with a reflection on the etymology of the word lesbian, which derives from the island Lesbos and refers to the birthplace of Sappho. The word lesbian, thus, compares love between women to writing. When we say 'lesbian', we say 'from Lesbos,' but also 'coming from Sappho,' or 'sapphic;' the category of 'lesbian' remains thus related to writing,<sup>552</sup> to poetry or rather to singing, as Sappho sang, rather than wrote her poetry. Her original work has only survived in fragments, sometimes recounted by others, sometimes found by coincidence. Sappho had her name transcribed, transferred between the alphabets; likewise, Vivien's name was transferred from English to French, thus relating Vivien's life and writing to transfer, to metaphor and translation. Likewise, Sappho became a symbolic figure of fragmentation that attracted imperfect, appropriative translations that differ as time passes. As Margaret Reynolds observes, "'Sappho' is not a name, much less a person. It is, rather, a space. A space for filling in the gaps, joining up the dots, making something out of nothing".<sup>553</sup> She 'functions as an attractive metaphor. Her work is in fragments, just as her body is broken. [...]'<sup>554</sup> In fact, Sappho has no authentic voice in any language, even her own.'<sup>555</sup> The Greek of the modern editions of Sappho's fragments is also a reconstruction of the lost Aeolic dialect of Ancient Greek, which Sappho spoke, and which was considered provincial in comparison to the language of Athens, Attic.<sup>556</sup> There is no original literature or life history to refer to, as Sappho's poetry has not been documented other than in fragments and citations, some of which were discarded and discovered only recently in most unpredictable places, such as fragments of dishes or garbage heaps.<sup>557</sup> As a character in Marçal's novel, Sappho appears, yet again, in translation, and in this she resembles Pauline Mary Tarn and her lover Natalie Barney.

<sup>552</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2020), p. 106.

<sup>553</sup> Margaret Reynolds, *The Sappho Companion* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>554</sup> Reynolds, p. 7.

<sup>555</sup> Reynolds, p. 16.

<sup>556</sup> Reynolds, p. 16.

<sup>557</sup> Reynolds, p. 2.

Sappho constitutes the first, perhaps archetypal, representation of sexual dissidence as one of the multiple faces of foreignness; Vivien, with her name ‘translated,’ foreign or estranged both in Victorian Britain and in France, her country of choice, follows Sappho’s footsteps.

Another “foreign” character that we encounter in *La passió* is Mathilde de Morny, nicknamed Missy, who had also inspired the character of la Chevalière in Colette’s novel *Le Pur et l’Impur* (‘The Pure and the Impure.’) In *La passió*, both Mathilde and Renée Vivien ‘acutaven amb el mateix rigorós incògnit de dissident en el propi país o d’espia en territori enemic.’<sup>558</sup> (‘performed under the same rigorous disguise of a dissident in her own country or a spy in enemy territory.’)<sup>559</sup> Sexual dissidence, then, is compared to the sense of strangeness, estrangement or foreignness that forces the characters to conceal their true selves. In the novel, the narrator follows Salomon Reinach, one of Vivien’s biographers, who is trying to recuperate the memories of Vivien – Missy is one of his informers. While remembering Vivien, Missy’s thoughts travel inexorably to her former partner, Colette, and the narrator ‘translates’ their conflict to the reader:

Colette havia volgut Missy maternal, amb aquella miopia de l’amfíbia momentània que no sap sinó traslladar al medi manllevant les categories del que li és més propi. I Missy s’havia sentit maternal, i havia pensat qe potser aquella paraula atrapava un glop de la substància misteriosa que se li escolava entre els dits cada cop que pensava en el femení singular en primera persona. Aquell femení que curiosament es trobava molt enfora o molt endins d’ella mateixa [...], ocupant aquell espai vague, sense signes ni indicis previs, sense alfabet ni idioma propi.<sup>560</sup>

[Colette had wanted a maternal Missy, with that myopia of a momentary amphibian who only knows how to transfer its own properties to the borrowed milieu. And Missy had felt maternal thinking that perhaps the world captured something of the mysterious substance that slipped through her fingers every time she thought of the feminine singular in the first person. That very same feminine that was curiously situated so far outside and yet so deeply inside of herself [...] occupying that vague space with no signs or previous clues, without an alphabet or language of its own.]<sup>561</sup>

In the fragment, the gendered categories according to which Mathilde perceived herself as a social being are metaphorized as language. Missy remains untranslatable to Colette, whose vision, opaque and overshadowed by binary gender categories, converts her partner into a

<sup>558</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, pp. 303-304.

<sup>559</sup> Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 270.

<sup>560</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, p. 306.

<sup>561</sup> Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 272,



foreigner. She tries to reduce Missy to a maternal figure, to the language of normative womanhood. But the space that Missy inhabits has no ‘language’, no ‘alphabet’, no codified expression.

One of the most prominent ‘dissident’ protagonists in Marçal’s novel is the androgynous San Giovanni, recreated from Renée Vivien’s novel *Une Femme M’Apparut* (‘A woman appeared to me.’) Although the novel is written in French, San Giovanni—as if to suggest his (her) foreignness—has an Italian, masculine name (and that of a Biblical character!). In her introduction to the English translation of Vivien’s novel, Gayle Rubin describes the character of San Giovanni as

a composite alter ego of the narrator. She’s Renée’s better half, her common sense, the courageous poet of Lesbos: in short, the core of Vivien’s identity which remained intact from the devastation of her unhappy passion. Sometimes San Giovanni is the wise Vivien of 1903 while the narrator is the innocent Vivien of 1890. San Giovanni is also one of the archetypes of Vivien’s personal mythology: the androgyne.<sup>562</sup>

San Giovanni, whom Rubin reads as Vivien’s alter ego, travels symbolically between languages and genders, just like Pauline Mary Tarn, who came to Paris from Britain, and was reborn under the name of Renée Vivien, having signed her first books of poetry as ‘R. Vivien,’ which led the critics to assume that she was a French man, until she replaced the letter with a whole name in its feminine form. The traveling names, from Renée Vivien to San Giovanni, seem to depict Vivien’s attempt to escape the realm of her native tongue: the traditional roles assigned to women within the heteronormative social paradigm of Victorian Britain. In *La passió*, the character based on Salomon Reinach offers another potential origin for the literary and symbolic meaning of San Giovanni. Salomon R. is convinced that (as he would expect in a *roman à clef*, which he considered Vivien’s *A woman appeared to me* to be), there must be a one-to-one, “real-life” equivalent for each character, an exact ‘translation’ of fiction into history. Determined to discover who hides behind the character of San Giovanni, Salomon R. rehearses several interpretations and resorts to the help of other people who knew Pauline-Renée. To find out about the “true” identity of the mysterious androgyne, Salomon R. collaborates with a number of other characters/narrators, such as Charles B. (based on Jean Charles-Brun, writer, journalist and a close friend of Pauline-Renée). In the novel, Vivien is said to have maintained a close and

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<sup>562</sup> Gayle Rubin, ‘Introduction’, in: Renée Vivien, *A Woman Appeared to Me*, trans. by Jeannette H. Foster (Paris: The Naiad Press., 1982), p. 13.

somehow ambivalent relationship with Charles B. Salomon R. finds out about the existence of a correspondence between Vivien and a mysterious woman named Suzanne; the biographer would like to get hold of the letters, as he is convinced that they would help him dissipate the mystery of San Giovanni. He complains about the fact that

Charles B. s'obstina a dir-me que és un personatge imaginari, una mena d'*alter ego* de la mateixa Pauline, amb el nom manllevat —evidentment— de l'obra de Leonardo que figura en el frontispici. Però, d'altra banda, jo sé que ell té les cartes. Fragments, cartes senceres, pràcticament recopiats a la novel·la, sembla. Li he insinuat de comprar-les-hi i no n'ha volgut ni sentir parlar [...], s'ha negat a dir-me com li han pervingut i quina és la identitat de la dona a la qual s'adrecen: una misteriosa Suzanne.<sup>563</sup>

[Charles B. insists that it [the character of San Giovanni] is imaginary – a sort of alter ego of Pauline herself, with the name obviously taken from the work of Leonardo which appears on the frontispiece. Yet, in spite of that, I know he has the letters. Fragments, and in some cases entire letters, that were simply transcribed into the novel. [...] [H]e refused to tell me where they came from, let alone the identity of the woman to whom they were addressed: a mysterious Suzanne. I hinted at buying them, but he would not hear of it.]<sup>564</sup>

In the novel, it is implied that Salomon R. later finds out, from a conversation with Vivien's chambermaid, that Suzanne could perhaps be Charles B. himself. Salomon R. mentions the reference to Leonardo da Vinci's painting as a subtext of Vivien's novel. Vivien's and Marçal's San Giovanni may be based on a painting by Leonardo da Vinci, of a gender-ambiguous Saint John the Baptist. In Da Vinci's representation, Saint John the Baptist is not a harsh, muscled and bearded man dressed in animal skin, as he would typically be represented, for example by Titian. Instead, he raises his smooth arm towards the sky, displaying a mysterious, almost sensual smile, his garment resembling more a dress or a tunic than a bundle of animal skins. The mention of the painting transports the reader from Paris, where the novel is mostly set, to Renaissance Italy, while additionally posing the question of both the gendering of the character in the painting and the crossing of boundaries between visual representation and literature, a recurrent motif in Marçal's novel. (We should not forget that the plot of *La passió* is structured around the idea of a film about Vivien and poses the question of 'translating' words into images. The last chapter of the novel, entitled 'Monòdia final' – 'Final Monody' suggests a musical structure, as if the composition of the last section was not textual, but musical.) But Salomon R. does not follow this trace. Instead, he insists on a biographical interpretation of Vivien's novel. As we find out

<sup>563</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, p. 320.

<sup>564</sup> Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 282.

later, when Charles B. appears as one of the narrators in the novel, the ‘mysterious Suzanne’ from Pauline’s letters was Charles B. himself, whom Vivien addressed using a feminine name, as their friendship acquired somehow ambiguous romantic tones. Unable to come up with any plausible biographical explanation, Salomon R. proceeds to relate the character of San Giovanni to Mathilde de Morny, always in search for a one-to-one equivalence. The unclear, often contradictory testimonies of different narrators point to impossibility: the impossibility to translate Vivien’s life, but also her gender expression, into language and into binary categories of gender.

The reflections on androgyny will bring Salomon R. to consider the problem of gender ambiguity in terms of translation, which he traces back to the Bible. When thinking of Mathilde, Salomon R. remembers a joke or an anecdote that he associates with her, which says that non-binary humans are the only ones who are truly human. In a diary, Salomon R. challenges the Biblical myth of Adam as a first man and Eve as a first woman. Salomon R. mentions ‘alguns comentaris rabínics sobre el Gènesi, pertanyents al Llibre de l’Esplendor (Zohar, en hebreu)’<sup>565</sup> (‘some Rabbinic commentaries on Genesis from the Book of Splendor, *Zohar* in Hebrew.’)<sup>566</sup> He then provides his insights on the Kabbalistic readings of the myth of Adam and Eve and reflects on the motif of sexual ambiguity in different literary texts, which include the figure of Adam Kadmon, ‘Segons aquesta visió l’home inicial, Adam Cadmon, hauria estat creat alhora mascle i femella a imatge i semblança d’un Déu andrògin.’<sup>567</sup> (‘According to this vision, the first man, Adam Cadmon, would have been created male and female at once, in the image and semblance of an androgynous God.’)<sup>568</sup> Salomon R. also mentions Leo the Hebrew’s attempts to explain the ‘notorious contradictions’ in the two passages of the first book of Pentateuch that narrate the process of creation.<sup>569</sup>

In *La passió*, Marçal reads the Torah as a polysemic, literary text, not a sacred message. That is why, when Salomon R. refers to a ‘contradiction’ in the book of Genesis, he compares the

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<sup>565</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, p. 320.

<sup>566</sup> Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 284.

<sup>567</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, p. 320.

<sup>568</sup> Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 284.

<sup>569</sup> ‘Encara, en els seus Dialoghi d’amore, Yehudà Abrabanel —vulgarment conegut per l’heterònim de Lleó l’Hebreu— intenta trobar un sentit esotèric en la notòria contradicció que oposa els dos passatges del primer llibre del Pentateuc que narren el procés de la creació.’ Marçal, *La passió*, p. 320. [‘Furthermore, in his *Dialoghi d’amore*, Judas Abravanel —popularly known by the heteronymous name of Leo the Hebrew— attempts to find an esoteric meaning in the notorious contradiction that opposes the two passages of the first book of the Pentateuch narrating the process of creation.’] Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 284.

motif of the ‘double being,’ the androgyne, to Plato’s *Symposium* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, as if suggesting that the texts should be studied together with the Biblical myths, as a trace of a past dialogue, across languages and traditions. If we take into consideration that the *Zohar* is mostly written in Aramaic, not Hebrew, then the series of translingual journeys that Salomon R. undertakes in order to build his argument is, in fact, even more complex than the Hebrew-Greek-Latin trajectory that could be deduced from the fragment. (In fact, later in the novel, Salmon R. also makes references to the androgynous presences in Balzac and Shakespeare.) The binary division of sexes established as normative in Western culture could thus be read as a refraction, a reading or a misreading, perhaps a simplifying translation.

According to Helen Kraus, the binary understanding of the sexes in Genesis is indeed related to translation, to a series of refractions of meaning that influence today’s readings not only of the figure of the first human, but also of God:

In Genesis 1, vv. 26–28, though brief, are revealing as regards the teaching concerning the gender relationship. Number is usually the critic’s prime interest; the number of God(s) is intimately related to the number of created humans in his/their image(s) and, by implication, to the accommodation of both male and female within one act of creation. The grammatically plural אֱלֹהִים in 1:26 takes a singular verb form (וַיֵּאמֶר), while the direct speech uses the plural verb form נַעֲשֶׂה and plural possessive pronouns, and אֱלֹהִים in 1:27 creates what appears to be a grammatically single but probably generic אָדָם in a singular image and likeness. He (or they), with a plural verb form, shall have dominion over all creatures. It seems uncertain whether the Hebrew has a pluralis maiestatis (or ‘plural of eminence’), as we understand it, in its literary arsenal, although some argue that, at least in the case of אֱלֹהִים, it does.<sup>570</sup>

The passages Kraus is referring to were translated as follows in the Complete Jewish Bible in English (henceforth CJW):

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<sup>570</sup> Helen Kraus, *Gender Issues in Ancient and Reformation Translations of Genesis 1-4* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, e-book version), pp. 16-17. (I have pasted the quotes in Hebrew from the Westminster Leningrad Codex Bible.) אֱלֹהִים stands for ‘God’ in the English Standard Version of the Bible, henceforth ESV. See: Genesis 1:26-28 <<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%201%3A26-28&version=ESV;WLC>> [accessed 6 August 2019] and in the Complete Jewish Bible, henceforth CJB <<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%201%3A26-28&version=CJB;WLC>> [accessed 6 August 2019]. וַיֵּאמֶר stands for ‘said’ in the ESV, <<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%201%3A26-28&version=ESV;WLC>> [accessed 6 August 2019] and in the CJB, <<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%201%3A26-28&version=CJB;WLC>> [accessed 6 August 2019]. נַעֲשֶׂה is translated as ‘let [us] make’, both in the ESV and the CJW, and אָדָם may be understood as ‘man’, ‘Adam’ or ‘human.’

26 Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, in the likeness of ourselves; and let them rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the animals, and over all the earth, and over every crawling creature that crawls on the earth.’

27 So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them: God said to them, ‘Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air and every living creature that crawls on the earth.’<sup>571</sup>

According to Kraus, the figure of God is most likely grammatically plural, rather than singular, the sex or gender of God, as well as of the first human, is not clear, as Kraus observes:

the first human was made by Yahweh not just out of the earth (אֲדָמָה), but from the dust (עֶפֶר) of the earth. Apart from the association with the color red, a feature of the earth, it is the (grammatically feminine) earth itself that yields the substance of man and gives him his name. Thus man not only shares his antecedents with the animal kingdom, as we learn from 2:19, but has a close relationship with the earth’s produce which God has given to him for sustenance, as underlined in 2:9.25. In 2:7, the man, once formed, needs to be imbued with the divine breath in order to become a living being, a נִפְשׁ חַיָּה (interestingly, a feminine noun) has an extensive semantic domain and may be translated variously as ‘soul’, ‘spirit’, ‘life’, inner being, etc., but also as ‘emotion’ or ‘passion’, even ‘desire’ or ‘appetite’.<sup>572</sup>

The passion, the color red, the earthly dimension of human experience, all constitute prominent motifs in Marçal’s literature – hence, perhaps, her interests in the Biblical myths of origin. The ‘untranslatability’ of the figure of the androgyne, adam, Adam, ‘human’ or ‘man,’ is linked to the difficulties of transposing the polysemy of Genesis into Catalan, it is also linked to the ‘foreignness’ of the sexually dissident characters as depicted by Marçal. As Kraus explains, referring to the text in Hebrew, ‘although God’s name [...] remains grammatically resolutely plural, the humanity he creates is clearly singular in the first instance, only to become plural — and gendered— at the end of the verse.’<sup>573</sup> This may be the ‘contradiction’ that Salomon R. referred to in *La passió*. Alternatively, Marçal’s narrator might also have had in mind the differences between Genesis 1:26–28 and the second narrative of creation, Genesis 2:18–23, according to which ‘woman’ was created from a piece of ‘man.’ This second contradiction could

<sup>571</sup> <<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+1%3A26-28&version=CJB>> [accessed 2 May 2020]  
The words “man” and “woman” in Hebrew, according to Kraus, share a common etymology.

<sup>572</sup> Kraus, p. 20–21.

<sup>573</sup> Kraus, p. 18.

be explained by Salomon R.'s evocation of the *Book of Zohar*, a gesture that suggests that there have been two 'adams' or 'Adams.' The first one would have emanated from the divine light as a divine being: Adam Kadmon, 'both male and female' according to Salomon R. (rather than, for instance, neither, or an intelligence, a non-anthropocentric idea or a beam of light with no vessels). The second, earthly adam that was created from the dust of the earth and infused with divine breath would constitute the mythical progenitor of us humans, made of flesh and blood. What is more, the mention of the *Book of Zohar* in *La passió* raises all the questions that follow *Zohar's* apparition in the history of literary interpretation. The controversies caused by the Kabbalistic masterpiece entail a range of topics relevant not only to spirituality but also to a vision of literature that fascinated Marçal. The *Book of Zohar*, first published by Mosés de León in the thirteen century Spain and ascribed by its publisher to Shimon bar Yochai, who was to write it around the second century, raises issues of authenticity, authorship, forgery versus originality, multiplicity versus homogeneity. Was the *Zohar* forged by the person who claimed to be its publisher? Was the story of human origin that it includes written by de León exclusively and "originally"? Was there an original version at all, or does it constitute a record of multiple narratives transmitted orally over the centuries? Is proof of the linguistic and therefore historical "authenticity" necessary for the book to contain spiritual value for its readers?

*La passió*, a novel of many novels, a collage of many languages and genres, by its very form asks similar questions, in that it constantly and systemically dilutes the figure of the author and that of the narrator. Structured around a mysterious manuscript of a screenplay around the life of Renée Vivien, whose "original" testimony is also absent, the book seems to problematize questions of literary "authenticity" from its beginning till the last pages. The concept of literary authenticity in *La passió* appears intrinsically linked to the authenticity of language that the narrators speak, as well as to their authenticity as socially constructed, gendered personas. The testimonies of the sexually dissident characters in *La passió*, transported across languages, countries, and cultural realms, resemble translations of a translation. The visibility and "translatability" of their stories, much like the dilemma of the first woman/man, is always refracted, deformed, fractured. By recounting Vivien's story and oeuvre, her personal and fictional relationships, Marçal creates a fictional account of a life, a version of multiple versions, in which history is mixed with literature, poetry merges with prose, diary and epistolary writing.

Both Renée Vivien and her lover, Natalie Barney, whose love story is central to the plot of *La passió*, were born in countries of English expression, lived in Paris and wrote in French. Vivien's verses, as well as fragments of her novels and letters, translated from French into Catalan, are not published as translations, but incorporated into *La passió*, with the figure of translator erased from the process. (Such translation practice also erases the name of the original author, whose status becomes closer to a fictional character, mediated by the main narrator.) As a British-born writer who writes in French, under the pen name of Renée Vivien, Pauline Mary Tarn translated her imagery not only into French, but into the French conventions of the time, finding inspiration in Parnassian imagery and Symbolism. Vivien also rewrote Biblical and Ancient Greek myths, as well as translated the works of Sappho into French, which also influenced her own work. Marçal's strategy of incorporating Vivien's verses in translation into the novel's plot can thus be seen as a secondary transfer, a refraction of a refracted text, a translation of not only a translation, but of a multilingual, heterogenous body of texts.

Similarly to Marçal, Fiedorczuk is very much interested in issues of (non)communicability, especially in terms of communicating non-human realities and languages in literature. (Although Fiedorczuk does address issues of communicating gender and sexuality, it is not in terms of translation; I dedicate more space to Fiedorczuk's queer characters in Chapter Five). In the next section, I take a closer look at the images of communicating non-human realities or 'translating' the non-human (including the figure of God) into human languages, focusing especially on the importance of silence.

### **Translation as Non-Communication, Writing as Non-Translation**

For a long time, Julia Fiedorczuk considered her poem 'Tlen' ('Oxygen')—which also gave title to the poet's poetic collection in English, translated by Bill Johnston—as her poetic manifesto.<sup>574</sup> 'I came here to breathe,' the poem says, but also 'I breathe, therefore I am.'<sup>575</sup> The reason why the poet considers this poem her manifesto is because oxygen constitutes, in Fiedorczuk's writing, the linking element—one of the many—that surrounds and enables all kinds of creativity, both human and non-human. It is one of the elements that are most "common," one of the most commonly found in nature, it metaphorizes community and

<sup>574</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, Interview with the author as part of the event 'Port poetycki,' online video recording, YouTube, June 2019 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAe3UrDceNM>> [accessed 19 July 2021]

<sup>575</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, *Oxygen*, p. 27.

communality. Fiedorczuk refers to oxygen as one of the most “sociable” elements, as most commonly it can be found in pairs, as O<sub>2</sub>. Indeed, linguistic and literary community-making is a significant element of Fiedorczuk’s reflection on the role of the literary representation in shaping attitudes towards the non-human world. But is community or communality possible without, or beyond, linguistic communication?

One of Fiedorczuk’s most powerful reflections on the limits to communication is contained in the book of poems *Psalms* (2017). According to Józef Sadzik, the priest who wrote the preface to the translations of Biblical Psalms by Czesław Miłosz from Hebrew into Polish, and who assisted Miłosz in his work as a translator, ‘Krzyk psalmisty jest tym głębiej przejmujący, że wyrywa się od człowieka, który całym sercem pragnie Boga’ (‘[t]he cry of him who sings psalms is all the more chilling because it comes from the man who desires God with his entire self.’)<sup>576</sup> The chilling cry, the profound desire of communication with God constitute, for Sadzik, the essence of the Psalms. In Fiedorczuk’s *Psalms*, the conversation with God becomes the conversation with one’s own body and with the non-human messengers such as landscapes, animals, or the laws of Physics. The poetic voice of ‘her who sings psalms’ is the voice of a mother, a thinking subject in despair, a voice of mourning and uncertainty which draws the readers’ attention to the unspeakable dimensions of the prayer’s ‘chilling cry’: a cry directed toward a non-human, non-linguistic entity and expressed in human language. In ‘Psalm III’ Fiedorczuk writes:

W jakim języku mam do ciebie mówić, słońce,  
 żebyś jutro wstało dla mojego dziecka, żebyś  
 wstało i pobudziło tkanki pokarmów,  
 krążenie [...]  
 jak mam tobie śpiewać, planeto, żebyś wybaczyła,  
 że urodziłam głód, że urodziłam  
 pytanie  
 zaczepione o nic, jak sobie zaskarbić  
 szczodropliwość stwórczynek – bakterii  
 czysty deszcz powietrze glukozę<sup>577</sup>

[In what language should I speak to you, oh sun, | so that you rise tomorrow for my child,  
 so that | you rise and prompt the tissues of the foods, | the circulation | [...] how can I sing  
 to you, oh planet, so you forgive, | that I gave birth to hunger, | that I gave birth to |

<sup>576</sup> Józef Sadzik, ‘O psalmach,’ in: Czesław Miłosz, *Księgi biblijne* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2014), p. 21.

<sup>577</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Psalmy*, p. 15.



doubts | rooted in nothing, how can I acquire | the generosity of our creators – bacteria | clean rain air glucose]

The writing/singing 'I' in the poem attempts to speak to the sun, the bacteria, instead of God – the usual protagonist to whom psalms are addressed. Like Marçal, who opens her first 'divisa' with an apostrophe to Fortune instead of God, Fiedorczuk wants to ask the sun and bacteria to show mercy to her child. But, in so doing, she expresses the impossibility of communication, the impossibility to formulate a prayer without language – a human, symbolic language which, as she suspects, will not be heard by the sun or bacteria. In the original Psalm 3, (subtitled 'A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son'<sup>578</sup>), the writing/singing/speaking 'I' was asking God to be his shield and armor. 'Arise, O Lord! | Save me, O my God! | For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; | you break the teeth of the wicked', says the original Psalm (in the English Standard Version Bible).<sup>579</sup> While the original psalm is listed by Józef Sadzik as one of the "psalms of pleading," Fiedorczuk version is a plea that problematizes the language of asking, of conversing with nature, which substitutes God. The unpredictability and fragility of the human body and that of the natural environment, especially when destroyed by human influence, calls for a figure of God, a god that speaks all languages. For in what language would humans address the sun, gravity, their nervous systems, the water, were there no omnilingual God to speak to?

Likewise, in her poem 'Weather,' Fiedorczuk expands, yet again, the definition of 'God' or 'spirit' to include the non-human world: 'Coś pożerało nasze słoneczne godziny. | Morze turlało się w skalistym gnieździe wabiąc księżyc, | duch ślizgał się po jego skórze, puszczał lśniące oko.'<sup>580</sup> ('Something was consuming our sunshine hours. | The sea churned in its rocky nest, luring the moon, | a smooth spirit crossing its skin, winking a bright eye.'<sup>581</sup>) There are several protagonists in the poem: the weather, the sea, the moon, and most of all the spirit, which is also the sun. The spirit, usually opposed to the material world, in Fiedorczuk's poem is a poeticized, physical phenomenon, not less sublime than the spirit of God that infuses the poet's word. In the poem, the spirit —the sun's light, humanized, together with the sea— is not reflected by the waters of the sea, it only crosses, strokes, slides on the sea's "skin," winking an

<sup>578</sup> Psalm 3, *ESV* <<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+3&version=ESV>> [accessed 20 October 2019]

<sup>579</sup> Psalm 3, *ESV* <<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+3&version=ESV>> [accessed 20 October 2019]

<sup>580</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Psalmi*, p. 55.

<sup>581</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, 'Weather', trans. by Bill Johnston, *Versopolis* <<https://www.versopolis-poetry.com/poet/166/julia-fiedorczuk>> [Accessed 5 February 2020]

eye. But the sea is also a bird – it churns in a rocky nest. Everything, and everyone, is connected with everything else. The poem goes on:

Po przejściu chmury nie byliśmy już sobą.  
Po przejściu chmury byliśmy znów sobą  
po aktualizacji zmarszczek, map  
godzin słonecznych i tych pochmurniejszych;  
pamięć—pajęczyna—wskazywała drogę.<sup>582</sup>

[After the cloud passed we were no longer ourselves. | After the cloud passed we were again ourselves | once we'd updated the crow's feet, maps | of the sunshine hours and those that were steeped in gloom; | memory—a spider's silk—was showing us the way.]<sup>583</sup>

The human body is a map, sun leaves its traces on it just as memory does. The two characters in the poem look at each other in the sun and do not recognize each other – you can now see all the wrinkles, all crow's feet, traces of the body's memory which, like a spider's web, show the two humans the way to move and communicate, the way to recognize each other in their history 'of sunshine hours and those that were steeped in gloom.' Fiedorczuk's spirit is more weatherly, earthly and bodily than bound to any specific religion, and it is the very spirit that inspires writing: 'duch podróżował od spacji do spacji, | wywołując kształty: pod ogromnym niebem, | w kruchym domu lata, zbieraliśmy je | na prezent.'<sup>584</sup> ('the spirit journeying from gap to gap | conjuring shapes: beneath a massive sky | in the flimsy home of summer, we gathered them | to make a gift.')585 The gaps, in the Polish version, are 'spacje' – the specific word to refer to 'space' in typing. We may, thus, infer that the lyrical 'I' here is typing, writing, conjuring shapes which, in fact, are conjured by the travelling spirit, they are gathered to make a gift – perhaps that of poetic creation.

The question of speaking to God and to nature returns in the book of short stories *Bliskie kraje*. In the short story 'Matka Boska Grawitacja' Fiedorczuk takes us to a small town, where a girl speaks to Virgin Mary whom she calls 'Mother-of-God Gravity.' She feels bad because she envies her sister. One Sunday, she experiences an unspeakable unity with the Virgin Mary, she feels she has been heard. But she does not know what she said to God's mother, as her communication with her was mostly extra-linguistic. The only word the girl remembers to have

<sup>582</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Psalm*, p. 55.

<sup>583</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'Weather.'

<sup>584</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Psalm*, p. 55.

<sup>585</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'Weather.'

pronounced in her thoughts was ‘Proszę’ (‘Please’) because, as she explains, she did not know what to say, and according to most people she knows a prayer should be a plea. The girl deduces that, if she is unsure what she said or meant to say, she must have spoken about something she wanted, and the thing she wanted the most was a green coat just like her sister’s. Did she mean, then, for her sister not to have the coat? Did she want a similar coat? This is impossible, she explained to herself, as the coat was ‘z darów’ (from the gifts gathered for the poor, usually sent from abroad into Communist Poland). Maybe she wanted the coat to get damaged? After talking to a friend, she concludes that she will be punished, most probably with cancer. Imaginary cancer grows inside of her, she feels ill and impure. She cannot eat, she vomits all the meals she had on that day. After this symbolic defilement (the boundaries of her body are crossed, the insides of her intestine expelled), the girl walks for many miles to meet with the Holy Gravity, incarnated in a statue of Virgin Mary in a nearby town. She tells the statue what worries her, what she has not been able to tell anyone else; only after that does she feel released. This time, when she attempts to tell Virgin Mary her thoughts in an orderly, linguistic way, she feels no connection.

It is telling that the holy figure in the child’s imagination relates to gravity. The reference may perhaps allude to Laurie Anderson’s poem titled ‘Angel of Gravity,’ which Fiedorczuk translated. At the beginning of the story, the girl thinks that gravity is something inevitable, something that always is, like the potatoes that are dropped into the ground to be planted, like the figure of the Virgin Mary in the nearby town. She relates the godly, the sacred, with the inevitable, and finds it hard to relate to the established, folkloric or dogmatic perceptions of what a “relationship” with the God figure should look like. She knows she is not supposed to talk to God, that she should only talk to the Virgin or the Saints, and that she should not ask too many questions – not think about languages, or anything else, just say thank you, that’s the safest, many children fall ill, so it is better to say thank you just in case. The girl feels this is not right but also feels guilty or ashamed for not doing what she is expected to do as a righteous, religious girl. The purification, symbolized by the expulsion of food and by the long walk – pilgrimage to repay her sins, comes from the shame and the guilt that only arrive when the girl confronts her feelings with the social norms of ‘speaking to God.’ In ‘Psalm 1’, the motif of speaking and silence comes back again:

niektórych wierszy nie można już napisać.  
niektórych nie dało się napisać wcześniej.

nocą rozpacz z powodu dzieci, utopionych  
 dzieci, powieszonych dzieci, spalonych  
 dzieci, zgłodzonych dzieci, maskotek dzieci  
 w rozbitym samolocie, bo macierzyństwo  
 jest dożywociem, a rozpacz szuka atrakcji  
 i pokupnych kształtów, żeby się w nie wystroić,  
 żeby się zasłonić, żeby się ochronić;  
 więc lepiej milcz, mówię, więc mówię: żadna  
 z waszych kości nie będzie połamana, powiedzmy,  
 „nie zabraknie wam żadnego dobra”, powiedzmy,  
 „będzie zasadzone drzewo u strumieni wód”<sup>586</sup>

[some poems cannot be written any longer. | some could not be written until now. |  
 nighttime despair because of the children, drowned | children, hanged children, burned |  
 children, massacred children, toys of children | in the plane wreck, because motherhood |  
 is a life sentence, while despair seeks ornaments | and pleasing shapes, so as to dress up  
 in them, | take shelter in them, be protected; | so best be quiet, I'm saying, so I'm saying:  
 none | of your bones is going to be broken, let's say, | 'you shall want for nothing,' let's  
 say, | 'a tree will be planted by the flowing waters'—]<sup>587</sup>

The writing (singing, speaking) ‘I,’ again a mother, speaks of the need to remain silent. Her poem dialogues with the Psalms (it is titled ‘Psalm 1’, it contains exact quotes from the Bible), with the idea of the blessed and the righteous. The poem constitutes a deliberate refraction of the Biblical text. In the Biblical Psalm 1, the ‘blessed man’ is ‘like a tree | planted by streams of water | that yields its fruit in its season, | and its leaf does not wither. | In all that he does, he prospers. | The wicked are not so, | but are like chaff that the wind drives away.’<sup>588</sup> He is a man who is calm and dedicated to the study of the Word, his calmness comes from an unconditional trust in God, like the trust that the writing ‘I’ expresses in ‘Psalm 23’: ‘The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want’<sup>589</sup> or, in Fiedorczuk’s poem, ‘you shall want for nothing.’ But when the writing ‘I’ of the Psalms becomes “translated” into a mother, so do the convictions that he —now turned into a she— expresses. The calm and wise trust in God become superficial or selfish. The images of peace and fulfillment are confronted with the misery of children, ‘drowned children, hanged children, burned children, massacred children, toys of children in the plane wreck.’ ‘Some poems cannot be written,’ the poet concludes, but, to express this conviction she needs to break the

<sup>586</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, *Psalmi*, p. 12.

<sup>587</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Oxygen*, p. 123.

<sup>588</sup> Psalm 1: 3-4, *ESV* <<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+1&version=ESV>> [accessed 20 October 2019]

<sup>589</sup> Psalm 1: 3-4, *ESV* <<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+23&version=ESV>> [accessed 20 October 2019]

silence, and so she speaks about the paradoxical dimension of writing about silence: ‘so best be quiet, I’m saying.’ Silence thus becomes part of the poem, not only to acknowledge the unspeakable, but also, as mentioned earlier, to come to terms with the impossibility of communicating with the non-human, to ‘translate’ it into human language. Faced with impossibility, both Fiedorczuk and Marçal will turn to expressing other connections, not necessarily symbolic and not always linguistic.

To embrace the limitations of symbolic language, for Fiedorczuk, is an ecopoetic gesture, also connected to questioning the autonomy of a work of art, which, as mentioned earlier, Fiedorczuk considers one of the fundamental assumptions of the American Modernism. Although Fiedorczuk admits to ‘come from Modernism’ and to be indebted to various American avantgardes,<sup>590</sup> she also points to some of its dilemmas. For Fiedorczuk,

On the one hand, Modernism includes the grand and totalizing ambitions of poets such as Ezra Pound or Laura Riding, both of whom at certain points in their careers expressed a firm belief in the redemptive potential of poetry. On the other hand, Modernism coincided with a time of questioning, of radical formal experiments, of “making it new.” Broadly speaking, this split can be related to the tension between what is called “High Modernism” and the avant-garde, the first term standing for the solidifying ambitions of the era and the second one epitomizing the destabilizing, revolutionary, or anarchic energies of the time.<sup>591</sup>

Fiedorczuk mentions the problematic associations of the author of *Cantos* with fascism, but she also objects to the assumptions that the reality, especially non-human, has to be ‘redeemed’ by poetry. When it comes to renewal, Fiedorczuk points to the relationship between ‘making things new’ and a certain ‘impulse to conquer and subdue.’<sup>592</sup> Fiedorczuk claims that Pound’s literary poetics underwent a transformation after the period he spent in a prison in Pisa, where he lived in an open cell, exposed to the rain, sun, and wind. While in the Pisan prison, Pound was to develop a literary ‘I’ that Fiedorczuk calls a “post-pastoral subject” (via Terry Gifford).<sup>593</sup> Fiedorczuk especially focuses on the moments of silence in Pound’s post-Pisan *Cantos*, on the “missing” connections between the images which open up the space to acknowledge the “untranslatability”

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<sup>590</sup> As she stated during the meeting with readers in Warsaw on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2019, to which I referred earlier.

<sup>591</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, “‘Pull Down Thy Vanity’: Post-Pastoral Subject in Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*,” *Journal Of Ecocriticism*, vol 1, No 2 (2009), p. 55.

<sup>592</sup> Fiedorczuk, “‘The Profession of Humility’: Marianne Moore’s Ethical Artifice,” p. 22

<sup>593</sup> Fiedorczuk, ‘Pull Down Thy Vanity’

of “the natural,” as occurs in a fragment that Fiedorczuk quotes from Canto LXXIV, 445: ‘the wind is also of the process, | sorella la luna | Fear god and the stupidity of the populace.’<sup>594</sup>

In her poem ‘Sorella la luna,’ Fiedorczuk continues Pound’s motif of a ‘sisterhood’ with the moon to speak of the human need to attribute philosophical meanings to natural phenomena:

Niebywałość światła w tej potężnej nocy.  
Która nie ma źródła.  
Która nie maleje.  
Twarz księżycy pocięta kreskami gałęzi,  
mozół mrówki, która nieustannie  
idzie do nieba.  
Ponieważ mrówka jest częścią procesu [...]  
Ponieważ liść jest częścią procesu,  
tylko żyć i umierać, żyć i umierać,  
żyć i umierać powoli  
jak gwiazda.

[The unheardofness of the light in this potent night time, | which has no source. Which does not lessen. | The face of the moon cut with lines of branches, | the toil of the ant incessantly | moving toward the sky. For the ant is a part of the process, [...]. For the leaf is a part of the process, | simply to live and die, live and die, | live and die slowly | like a star.]<sup>595</sup>

Like Marçal, Fiedorczuk continues her ‘dialogue’ with Pound, whose work she commented in her critical work, in her poetry. In the poem, the moon, whose light is ‘unheard of’ is a sister. Her (the moon’s) message is not to be understood or deciphered by human ear. The stars, the moon, the ants and leaves exist, they are ‘part of the process,’ they are interconnected and included in the poet’s task of creating meaning. They live and die, but they also have their forms of creativity – like the ant’s toil, the poet’s task requires effort and dedication, it provides a purpose to the human and non-human lives that, sooner or later, will end.

The antropomorphized image of the ‘face of the moon’ being ‘cut with lines of branches’ may perhaps be read as an allusion to John Ashbery’s ‘Summer’ from *The Double Dream Of Spring*. In his poem, Ashbery spoke of a shadow ‘divided among the twigs of a tree,’ only to immediately attribute meaning to it: the shadows were divided up just like life, ‘between you and me.’ In her essay on Ashbery, Fiedorczuk intentionally misreads Ashbery as a Romantic poet. He is compared to Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), one of the founders of British

<sup>594</sup> Fiedorczuk, ‘Pull Down Thy Vanity,’ p. 60.

<sup>595</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Oxygen*, p. 28-29

Romanticism, who infused nature with religious meanings, which, for Fiedorczuk, entails “translating” non-human meanings into human spirituality. This, of course, is a deliberately exaggerated reading, in which Fiedorczuk is using Ashbery’s poem to make a point.

In her own poems, Fiedorczuk proposes, as I have tried to demonstrate, multiple devices to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that the poet’s impressions of the non-human world are mediated, refracted, they are limited by ‘translation,’ in which our imagination is the prism or the translating, refracting device. At times, Fiedorczuk’s lyrical ‘I’s insert words from other languages or disciplines, sometimes they admit to their limitations, and other times they conclude that silence may be the loudest scream, so ‘best be quiet.’ But there is yet another answer to the poet’s limitations in communicating the non-human worlds – it is to communicate our, the human’s, connection to the non-humans. The next (and last) section of this chapter is dedicated precisely to interconnectedness, which constitutes one of the foundations of Fiedorczuk’s poetics, but it can also be found in Marçal.

### **Towards an Embodied Expression of Interconnectedness**

For Fiedorczuk, the foundation of writing, imagination and inter-species cohabitation could be summarized in the notion of interbeing, a Buddhist metaphor according to which everything is connected with everything else. In Fiedorczuk’s words:

Interconnectedness is [...] one of the foundations of Buddhist thought. Thích Nhất Hạnh, a Vietnamese monk, peace activist and pioneer of mindfulness – the practice of which has now been completely appropriated by capitalism – speaks of ‘interbeing’ as a means of describing the infinitely complex network of inter-dependencies between all the elements of the universe. One of the fundamental Buddhist texts, the so-called *Flower Garland Sutra (Avatamsaka Sūtra)*, depicts the same intuition by using the metaphor of Indra’s Net – a huge, diamond-studded net in which every diamond reflects and is in turn reflected by all the other diamonds.<sup>596</sup>

The metaphor of prism and of reflection, this time, expresses the mutual influence of all living beings, out of whom humans are most responsible for “the sixth great extinction.” For Fiedorczuk, to think of home not only means the actual house where one lives, or the home as language, but also one’s body, which is connected and conditioned by other bodies and elements of the world, such as air, water, and bacteria. She writes: ‘2 metry kwadratowe skóry, | koniec

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<sup>596</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, ‘On Interbeing,’ *Przekrój* (July 2019) <<https://przekroj.pl/en/articles/feuilletons/on-interbeing>> [accessed 15 October 2019]

świata to moje | mieszkanie, 30 kilometrów kwadratowych | błon komórkowych domu | pańskiego powszedniego i woda, | woda, woda dla spragnionego, pijcie'<sup>597</sup> ('2 square meters of skin | the limit of the world is my | dwelling, 30 square kilometers | of cell membrane in the house | of our daily, godly house, and water, | water, water for the thirsty, drink')<sup>598</sup>

As Fiedorczuk seems to claim, not only do humans watch, see, and represent the non-human world and attribute meanings to it, but the rivers, animals and stars, move and are interconnected according to different meanings or rhythms of their own. In her poem "Evening" she writes: 'aż się dołem wykluje gorący pomarańcz— | aż wreszcie rzece pójdzie kropla krwi | w miejscu gdzie wbiła się gwiazda: | tam dwa przecinki w wiotkim tańcu życia, | oczlik i rozwielitka'<sup>599</sup> ('till burning orange will be hatched below | and the river will release a drop of blood | in the place the star has pierced: | two commas in the supple dance of life, cyclops and daphnia.')<sup>600</sup> The sun is compared to an orange or to the color orange, thus pointing to the material connections between the symbolic name of the color and its material roots. The sun, is 'piercing' the river's skin and the river, as if it was an animal or a person, releases a drop of blood. If we look closely at this image, it also seems like a painting, a postcard. But the image of the river is not only used as a generic metaphor, we also receive a detailed description of the river's individual life, comprised of many, interconnected, tiny lives such as cyclops and daphnia. An important link between the animal, human world and landscape is blood – the river is pierced and it bleeds. Fiedorczuk brings attention to the fact that, just like the river, humans and other animals are comprised of water, thus creating a sense of interconnectedness. For Marçal, blood and water are also important symbols to express interspecies links and alliances. In one of her poems, she uses the image of stars bleeding. As the poet explains in her letters to Jean Paul Goujon, the image of the stars menstruating, which she used in one of her poems is meant to convey positive, unifying connotations. Marçal refers to the following passage from her book of poems *La germana, l'estrangera*: 'Recordes? Menstruaven les estrelles | i un crit de primavera temerària | tacava els llençols lívids de la por'<sup>601</sup> ('Remember? The stars were menstruating | and a call of reckless spring | was staining the sheets, livid from fear.') In commenting on Goujon's strategies in translating her poems into French, Marçal explains to

<sup>597</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Oxygen*, p. 96.

<sup>598</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Oxygen*, p. 97

<sup>599</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Oxygen*, p. 8.

<sup>600</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Oxygen*, p. 9.

<sup>601</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 310.



Goujon that in Catalan, to refer to a menstruating woman, one can say that she *floreix* – she ‘blooms.’<sup>602</sup> The poem, which talks about love between two women, is a nostalgic account of a joyful connection between them, which draws on metaphors of spring and blood, which connote life, but also, by the end of the poem, injury, as the lover is no longer present. Marçal explains her intended connotations as follows:

‘Menstruaven les estrelles’ — Estic d’acord amb la idea de cercar un circumloqui per resoldre el problema. La teva solució és bona, però caldria buscar un verb que no fos *pleurer*, ja que *menstruar* no té pas connotacions tristes, és una paraula neutra (més aviat tècnica). I en aquesta part del poema caldria guardar aquesta neutralitat (*verser*, per ex.) o decantar-se per una paraula de connotacions alegres, positives, ‘primaverals.’ [...] Aquest vers pertany al passat-presència i evoca un moment de força còsmica en el qual fins les estrelles eren per a ‘nosaltres’ com un mirall, ja que elles *també* vessaven la seva sang menstrual.<sup>603</sup>

[‘The stars were menstruating’ – I agree with the idea to seek an indirect way of solving the problem. Your solution is good, but it’s necessary to look for a different verb than *pleurer*, because to *menstruate* does not have sad connotations, it is a neutral word (it is rather technical). And in this part of the poem you either need to preserve this neutrality (eg. *verser*) or opt for more positive, happy, ‘spring like’ connotations. [...] This verse belongs to the past-present and evokes a moment of a cosmic force in which even the stars were there for ‘us’, like a mirror, given that the stars were *also* shedding their menstrual blood.]

On the one hand, Marçal’s poem does reflect a slightly narcissistic point of view (the writing ‘I’ ‘translates’ the stars, she gives reasons for their existence that are relevant to humans, for example by linking the blood with ‘staining’ the white sheets as a sign of symbolic resistance); the stars are anthropomorphized, they are there “for” the two women, ‘like a mirror;’ on the other hand, the poet transmits a deep sense of interconnectedness between the women, whose blood is reminiscent of the flow of life in the earth’s ‘rebirth’ after winter, which links the human and non-human bodies in a poetic sign of interconnectedness or, perhaps, interbeing, as Fiedorczuk would put it.

In a recent article Fiedorczuk proposes an alternative to the narcissistic, self-sufficient notion of poetic self, expressed in the notion of interbeing. She asks:

What if we stopped imagining ourselves to be separate, finished, closed ‘egos’ [...]? What if we imagined instead a process of becoming (or rather, co-becoming) the ego *and* all

<sup>602</sup> Marçal, *El senyal de la pèrdua*, p. 151.

<sup>603</sup> Marçal, *El senyal de la pèrdua*, p. 151.

other beings, energies, phenomena. What if we saw that the air which we breathe, too, is part of our process, as well as water—which constitutes a substantial part of our organisms—and food – the bodies of plants and animals that become part of our body? Words, too.<sup>604</sup>

An inspiring example of interbeing or co-becoming put into poetic practice is Fiedorczuk's poem 'Beetle,' in which the writing 'I' loses its boundaries and blends with the object. The poem reads:

Tyle życia  
 Że wrze w malutkim sercu, że prawie rozsadza  
 Mój chitynowy kostium, moją suknię z ciała.  
 Tyle mam dzisiaj głodu i tyle pragnienia  
 Że dzień musi się zmienić w nieskończony strumień  
 Nasyconej żółci, ten soczysty owoc, świat.<sup>605</sup>

[So much life | It seethes in my tiny heart, almost bursts | my suit of chitin, my gown of flesh. | Today I have such hunger, such desire | That the day must turn into an endless stream | Of insatiable gall, that luscious fruit, the world.]<sup>606</sup>

Fiedorczuk's beetle experiences a voracious desire for the world, which is compared to hunger. This hunger/desire will not be fulfilled – instead, the day will turn into an 'endless stream of insatiable gall.' Gall brings to mind the bile, the color yellow, and stomach acid, the evocation of which is not common to refer to beetles. In fact, in the original poem, Fiedorczuk uses the word *żółć*, which means 'bile' and 'yellow' at the same time, thus signaling, yet again, the material origins of the symbolic, linguistic names of colors. Apart from its spiritual desire for the world, the beetle also possesses a 'suit of chitin,' its exoskeleton which is compared to a garment, and its 'gown of flesh,' which juxtaposes the beetle's chitin 'costume' to that of humans.

In the poem, these qualities are not mutually exclusive even though the transformation of the beetle into the poet may not be explained scientifically nor is it an easily "translatable" allegory. The function of this metamorphosis is, I would argue, to generate estrangement, to destabilize the traditional, containing gaze of the artist towards "Nature" without falling into the fantasy of a "faithful" representation. Even though Fiedorczuk's beetle does not speak its "own voice" in the poem (the work is still designed for humans and not for beetles), the poet does not aim to represent the beetle's point of view, language or perception.

<sup>604</sup> Fiedorczuk, 'On Interbeing.'

<sup>605</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, *Oxygen*, p. 37.

<sup>606</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, *Oxygen*, p. 37.

The blending of the poet with the beetle, a transformation much less expected than that of a false “translation” of the non-human into the symbolic, creates an effect of strangeness or, indeed, estrangement (as Victor Shklovsky famously stated when referring to the adoption of a horse’s point of view in Tolstoy as one of the ways to create *ostranienie*, an estranging effect.<sup>607</sup>) In other words, when writing about the beetle, Fiedorczuk is pointing to the incompleteness of any morphing motion, be it translation, metaphor, or metamorphosis. The inter-species and multilingual community, for Fiedorczuk, can exist without focusing exclusively on ensuring symbolic ‘communication.’

For Fiedorczuk, one of the key elements of translating, but also of writing and cohabiting in the interconnected world, has to do with reading, with listening to what the author has to say about the world she or he represents. Listening is also important for Marçal in that the melody of the translated text, especially in poetry, is the first and most fundamental step of engaging with the text. While Fiedorczuk ‘listens’ for ideas, Marçal listens to absorb the sound and rhythm of the original text. Marçal privileges women and the feminist perspective in her choices of authors to translate, while Fiedorczuk’s primary interests lie in exploring the attitudes of the translated authors towards the non-human world – Fiedorczuk’s perspective as a scholar is deeply rooted in ecocriticism, ecology and materiality and it is along these theoretical lines that her dialogues with the translated writers occur. In both cases we may say that the authors’ translation choices are a result of a political and ideological engagement, of acknowledging complex relations of power that the literary canons of each languages are subject to. In both writers’ work a complex understanding of writing subjects emerges, subjects that do not concentrate on “the impulse to conquer and subdue” the objects of their writing,<sup>608</sup> but rather to describe the fragmented interaction of the writer with that which is presented or represented.

The ‘foreign’ references and elements in Fiedorczuk’s and Marçal’s texts, together with the acknowledgement of the authors’ bodily, material entanglement with the world —the

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<sup>607</sup> According to Shklovsky, ‘Tolstoy makes the familiar seem strange by not naming the familiar object. [...] Tolstoy uses this technique of “defamiliarization” constantly. The narrator of “Kholstomer,” for example, is a horse, and it is the horse’s point of view (rather than a person’s) that makes the contents of the story seem unfamiliar.’ See: Victor Shklovskii, ‘Art as Technique,’ Viktor Shklovskii, B. V. Tomashevskii, B. Ėikhenbaum, *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, Second Edition, trans. by Lee T. Lemon, Marion J. Reis (Lincoln/ London: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), p. 22.

<<https://search-ebscohost-com.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1875494&site=ehost-live&scope=site>> [Accessed 20 September 2020]

<sup>608</sup> Those words that Fiedorczuk wrote about the poetry of Marianne Moore may well be applied to the Polish poets’ own literary production. See: Fiedorczuk, “‘The profession of humility’: Marianne Moore’s Ethical Artifice.’

physical processes to which the body responds, the presence of non-human inhabitants such as bacteria and fungi in the body, the materiality of human languages— have fundamental importance for the ways in which writing subjects are (re)produced. A deep sense of interconnectedness, of different forms of life and expression as part of the same vessel, the same prismatic web of mutually influential waves or reflections, permeates Fiedorczuk's and Marçal's understanding of language and communication. As I will argue in the next chapter, such sense of interconnectedness may be understood in multiple, polysemic ways; it is also inherently linked to the motifs of transcending boundaries or mixing – in translation and in the human or inter-species cohabitation.

## Chapter Five: Multilingual Outsiders: Passion, Writing, and Border-Crossing

it's too late for countries  
but it's not too late for trees...  
—Brenda Hillman (2018)

During a meeting with readers that I had a chance to attend in September 2019, I asked Julia Fiedorczuk about the importance of the cross-lingual links in her writing. Is the presence of languages other than Polish in her texts related to her research into ‘new’ ways of saying in the poets she has studied? Is literary multilingualism linked to ecopoetics? Does a multilingual text become “ecological” insofar as it invites the readers to translate (rather than translating for them), to make connections between different languages as well as, for instance, between the language of poetry and that of the natural sciences? Fiedorczuk responded with a metaphor: ‘interdisciplinarity is not about abolishing boundaries, it is about permeating.’ She thus pointed to a need for redefining borders between languages, registers, and fields of knowledge, as an important premise in the debate on multilingualism and interdisciplinarity. Fiedorczuk evoked the scientist and writer Rachel Carson, who reportedly claimed that science needs poetry in order to best render the knowledge of natural phenomena. When it comes to multilingualism in Fiedorczuk’s texts, the author also explained that she sees multilingual literature as ‘somehow related to Eros’, to the love of that which is other, almost as if the contact with foreign languages, alphabets, texts could be compared to romance or desire.

Similarly, for Marçal, writing is germane to passion, which, for Marçal, ‘té connotacions d’intensitat i desmesura. Des-mesura: sense mesura. Fora de les mesures, dels molles unificadors dominants,’<sup>609</sup> (‘has connotations of intensity and disproportion. Dis-proportion: without proportion. Outside of proportions, of the unifying, dominant frames.’) Disproportion and *desmesura*, from *mesura*, ‘measure,’ connote overcoming order, pushing against the ‘universally’ defined, patriarchal delimitation of desire, especially women’s desire. For Marçal, to push against the limits of expressing desire means to seek ‘l’amor apassionat: transcendir, anar més enllà,’ (‘passionate love: to transcend, to go beyond.’)<sup>610</sup> The poet mentions a ‘cara forta,

<sup>609</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2020), p. 173.

<sup>610</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2020), p. 180.

cara creativa,<sup>611</sup> a strong or creative side of passionate desire, which fuels writing.<sup>612</sup> But, for Marçal, passion and desire also have a ‘cara fosca’ or ‘dark side’:

El amor té sempre alguna cosa de terrible: els cims i els abismes poden suscitar un terror sagrat, perquè realment accedir-hi comporta perills. La proximitat de la bojeria és possiblement un dels espectres més reals. [...] Una altra: el canibalisme, menjar-se l'altre, ser menjada per l'altre...

[Love always has its terrible parts: the peaks and the abysses may cause a sacred terror, because to engage in [love] entails certain dangers, one of the most real and proximate specters being insanity. [...] Another [terrible element is] cannibalism, to devour the other, to be devoured by the other...]

Passion, disproportion, peaks and abysses are all metaphors of the extreme, which relate to approaching, indeed exceeding, the limits or boundaries that define order, rationality, sanity. To abolish boundaries, to embrace limitless desire, for Marçal, may lead to a loss of self-determination and thus, to being ingested by the other and/or to ingesting the other.

Marçal's definition of passion is in itself not clearly delimited: the poet mentions obsessive desire, but sometimes, as above, she identifies ‘passion’ with ‘love’, sometimes distinguishes between the two; sometimes she seems to refer to relationships between people, sometimes to writing, intertextuality, or the influence between writers. The fragments of Marçal's essays that relate to desire are usually impersonal, it is ‘love’ that acts as a personified concept, as if it were capable of doing things to —or on behalf of— the people involved. The metaphor of passion as a questioning of boundaries becomes, thus, a structural metaphor, symbolizing an elusive attitude towards boundaries and definitions which, as I will argue, also applies to the author's relationships with other writers and with languages other than Catalan.

The crossing, or transgression, of borders is not always easy or placid, but neither is their establishment and enforcement. The act of ordering, of tracing borders, of delimiting and dividing, serves to ‘define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*’, as Anzaldúa writes in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. A border, according to Anzaldúa, ‘is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary.’<sup>613</sup> In literary texts, physical or political borders, such as fences, walls, rivers and custom controls, may run across the pages. But some

<sup>611</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac*, p. 172.

<sup>612</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac* (2020), p. 172.

<sup>613</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera. The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), p. 25.

borders are less tangible than others. In *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, Anzaldúa deploys ‘border’ in a polysemic way, which is relevant to Marçal’s and Fiedorczuk’s prose. Land, language, body all relate to boundaries that demarcate a territory. Borders are embodied and constantly crossed; as Anzaldúa further describes, the borderland is a territory that is inhabited and that inhabits its inhabitants. Anzaldúa draws on *Nepantla*, a Nahuatl word that means ‘in the middle’ to conceptualize her experience as a Chicana lesbian from Texas, one who acts, through her writing, as an intermediary, negotiating between different cultural affiliations and linguistic expressions of the self. She widely employs code-switching strategies of writing, between English, Spanish and Nahuatl, as well as Spanglish, to recount the history of the Mexican-American border. It is no coincidence that, in order to talk about borders, Anzaldúa uses a hybrid, multi-generic and multilingual form. Anzaldúa’s vision of inhabiting a borderland is reminiscent of Fiedorczuk’s ‘bliskie kraje’ (‘close lands’ or ‘close countries,’) the title of her book of short stories that explores the ‘homely’ and the ‘foreign’ as two coexisting, interconnected concepts that entail not only the relationships between languages and countries, but also between individuals, human and other.

In the first section of this chapter, I look at fragments of her novel *Nieważkość*, in which Fiedorczuk puts her conceptualization of permeable borders into practice. I explore the definition of language borders and the ways in which languages can mix. In my view, Fiedorczuk’s text can be read not only as a reflection on literary multilingualism, but also as a comment on unequal distribution of symbolic and linguistic space between different groups of humans and non-humans. In other words, by pointing to the porous nature of language borders, Fiedorczuk is also signaling the hierarchical dimensions of multilingualism, focusing especially on the hegemonic position of English as a language of international corporate industry. In *Nieważkość*, she compares the ‘international universality’ of English to the hegemonic position of humans vis-à-vis other species. This is not to say that Fiedorczuk uses a generalized concept of ‘human’ as a species without attending to differences and inequalities, socioeconomic and other, between different groups. Indeed, in Fiedorczuk’s short stories, to which I refer in the second section of this chapter, the Polish author contrasts the figure of an ‘outsider,’ represented by the homeless, the disabled, women, children, and other others, with different visions of ‘universal,’ ‘human’ languages that exclude certain non-normative registers or codes of expression. The outsiders, yet again, are banished from the realm of reason, culture, and sanity. In other words, section one

attends to the literal, and section two to the metaphorical meaning of language and language mixing. The second section ends with a reflection on normativizing attitudes towards expressions of desire, especially women's desire, which ties into Marçal's understanding of literature as limitless passion. In sections three and four, I examine fragments of Marçal's essays, poems and novel, with the intention of gathering and summarizing the fragments in which the poet talks about writing and passion. Section three is dedicated to Marçal's understanding of passion and desire as part of the poet's vision of literature; in section four, I examine passion as suffering, bound up in desire and (dis)identification, which Marçal relates to writing, reading and translating. My hypothesis, which I rehearse in this chapter, is that what animates Marçal's and Fiedorczuk's views on language and writing are at least two different visions of negotiating boundaries. Fiedorczuk's texts focus on language borders, depicted as porous, permeable entities forever in the process of becoming. Accordingly, Fiedorczuk suggests a more flexible perception of language borders, as well as borders between the normative and non-normative uses of language. Marçal, for her part, tends to deploy the metaphors about abolishing boundaries that restrict and demarcate women's desire; Marçal's work illustrates the poet's understanding of human and literary relationships as a quest for identification and for accepting difference.

### **Language Borders or the Politics of Prosciutto**

In an article on language borders,<sup>614</sup> Dagna Zinkhahn Rhobodes reflects on what it means to 'cross, displace or suspend a language border.'<sup>615</sup> 'How can these hitherto figuratively regarded concepts be described and explained in a linguistic analysis? Which processes take place at the language border between two languages in contact, and what are the structural consequences of these dynamic phenomena?', the author asks.<sup>616</sup> Zinkhahn mentions three aspects of borders: differentiation, transgression and formation of border zones. A language border is thus understood as:

the structural border between two language systems, mostly phonetically manifested as a point of language switch. Following Greco, Renaud and Taquechel (2013), it can be

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<sup>614</sup> Dagna Zinkhahn Rhobodes, 'Crossing and Blurring the Language Borders. The Example of German-Polish Language Contact', In *Beyond Language Boundaries. Multimodal Use in Multilingual Contexts*. Ed. by Marta Fernández-Villanueva, Konstanze Jungbluth (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

<sup>615</sup> Zinkhahn Rhobodes, p. 202.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid.



interpreted from the dialectological tradition as the dividing line between two “language spaces” which can be crossed<sup>617</sup>

Language borders can therefore be thought of as limits which divide two different orders or systems, as well as the place of crossing and passing, which, in turn, may lead to the blurring of borders.<sup>618</sup> Based on this formulation of language borders, three fundamental concepts emerge, according to Zinkhahn, with which to conceive of the border: durability, permeability and liminality:

Durability refers to the density and the stability of borders. Durable language borders are clearly identifiable; they are undoubtedly marked and evidently separate two language systems from one another. [...] Permeability refers to combining and connecting qualities of borders. [...] Permeable language borders are observable, but they are not rigid and impassable. They constitute a penetrable “threshold” or “membrane” which enables reciprocal phonetic, morphological and/or syntactic influence between two languages in contact. Dynamic processes of border crossing may lead to blurring and even dissolution of borders. The melting of borders can in turn cause the emergence of new spaces of “in-between-ness.”<sup>619</sup>

To begin with, I will examine durable borders between languages in Fiedorczuk’s *Nieważkość*, with the help of Zuzanna, the protagonist of Fiedorczuk’s novel mentioned in the second chapter. Zuzanna, the child who wanted to become a painter and who was abused by her professor, later in the novel finds employment in an advertising company that uses artworks to sell other products. Zuzanna is sent on a business trip to Athens, and so she is googling the name of a Greek art gallery in preparation for her journey. This is the first instance of a visibly foreign word in the novel:

Wstukała w wyszukiwarkę nazwę galerii: Utopia. Znalazła stronę internetową i zapowiedź wystawy, po angielsku i po grecku. Przyjrzała się greckim literom: ουτοπία. Postanowiła, że nauczy się przynajmniej alfabetu.<sup>620</sup>

[‘She typed into a search engine the name of the gallery: Utopia. She found a Web page and an announcement of the exhibition, in English and Greek. She examined the Greek letters: ουτοπία. She decided she will at least learn the alphabet.’]

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<sup>617</sup> Ibid.

<sup>618</sup> Zinkhahn Rhobodes, pp. 204-205.

<sup>619</sup> Zinkhahn Rhobodes, pp. 205-207.

<sup>620</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość*, p. 29.

In the fragment quoted, the foreign status of the Greek word, and therefore the border that divides the languages is accompanied by a comment: the announcement is said to be available in Greek and English. The reader, while reading the narrator's explanation in Polish, gets a clear sense of the presence of borders that divide different languages, and alphabets, in the text. The language border in the above passage, following Zinkhahn's classification, may thus be considered as 'impermeable border,' where no transfer of phonetic, morphological or syntactic features takes place.<sup>621</sup> The choice of 'foreign vocabulary', however, does not seem coincidental. The word 'utopia,' the gallery's name in *Nieważkość*, is written in Greek, but it also functions in Polish as a common noun, meaning 'an intention impossible to accomplish,' 'an ideal of a happy society or an ideology that postulates the creation of such society' as well as 'a didactic, fantastic literary genre to represent an ideal society,'<sup>622</sup> the last meaning referring to Thomas More's vision of an archetypal, harmonious community.<sup>623</sup> Utopia, from Greek *ou* 'not' and *topos* 'place,' may therefore be read as a suggestion of impossibility, for example, the impossibility of reading a foreign word correctly – a word that nevertheless functions widely outside its source language. In the novel, the no-place, perhaps even a place outside, most probably refers to the exhibition of 'outsider art.'

This is only one of the narrator's nods to the arbitrariness of borders, linguistic and other. In a conversation between Zuzanna and her manager —a condescending young boss who pretends to act as a modern leader of an international advertising company "Blue Arrow," using foreign-sounding words to back up his arguments, we can observe a peculiar attitude towards linguistic 'loans':

– Taką książkę czytałem ostatnio o ezoteryce – powiedział, kiedy Zuzanna wróciła do stolika. – O ezoteryce – powtórzyła. – Bo to, co widzisz – popatrzył na swoją dłoń – to, co widzisz, to jeszcze nie wszystko. [...] – Na przykład podróże w czasie: one są możliwe. To jest kwestia *techne*. – Mówisz po grecku – zażartowała, ale nie zarejestrował tego.<sup>624</sup>

['I was reading this book the other day, on esoterica', he said when Zuzanna came back to the table. 'Esoterica,' she repeated. 'Because what you see,' he looked at his hand,

<sup>621</sup> Zinkhahn Rhobodes, p. 209.

<sup>622</sup> 'Utopia,' in *Słownik Języka Polskiego PWN* <<https://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/utopia.html>> [accessed 28 August 2020]

<sup>623</sup> See: Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. by George M. Logan and Robert M. Adams, revised ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>624</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość*, p. 56.

‘what you see is not all.’ [...] ‘Time travels, for example: that’s possible. It’s a question of *techne*.’ ‘You speak Greek,’ she joked. He didn’t notice.]

*Techne* is written in its original form and in italics. Zuzanna’s ironic comment that marks the border between languages (‘You speak Greek’), yet applied to substitute the Polish word *technika*, which would normally be used in this context. The word *technika* (technology, technics, technique), just like *technikum* (vocational school) or *technik* (technician), comes from the Greek *techne*. The borders between the two languages, although marked linguistically, are again implicitly questioned. Zuzanna’s manager uses the original word instead of its Polish derivative, as if suggesting that he, an educated, ‘cultured’ man, Zuzanna’s superior within the capitalist system of power, can decide on the words to be used, whether or not they have been approved by normative linguists. But the foreign insertions also may be used to destabilize, or at least bring the readers’ attention to, the tensions between the “foreign”, the “national,” and the “universal” uses of language. Let us observe another example of a language border, one that, in Zinkhahn’s terms, could be considered a “penetrable boundary”, that is to say, one that can be crossed:

Gatunek ludzki powinien podlegać ochronie – oświadczył Rafał. – Podlega – zauważyła Zuzanna. – W większości krajów nie można polować na ludzi. – Nie żartuj sobie. Chodzi o ekosystem. Słyszałaś o tym. O ochronę środowiska. Siedzieli przy kontuarze w bistro serwującym żywność „ekologiczną” albo „zdrową”, do wyboru. [...] – Stawką jest przetrwanie planety – ciągnął. – Bez ludzi to będzie masakra. Masowa zagłada zwierząt. Tych twoich kretów i innych jebanych lisów. Żółwi. – Wgryzł się we wrapa z prosciutto.<sup>625</sup>

[‘The human species should be protected,’ Rafał announced. ‘It is,’ said Zuzanna. ‘In most countries it’s not allowed to hunt humans.’ ‘Stop joking. It’s about the ecosystem. You’ve heard about ecosystem. Environmental protection.’ They were sitting in a bistro that served ‘organic’ or ‘healthy’ food – you name it. ‘It’s about the survival of the planet’, he went on. ‘Without humans it would be a freaking mess.’<sup>626</sup> Mass extinction of animals. All those moles of yours, the fucking foxes. Turtles too.’ He bit into his prosciutto wrap.]

<sup>625</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość*, p. 49.

<sup>626</sup> The word “*masakra*” (“massacre” according to the normative use of Polish and figuratively or colloquially any disastrous or extreme situation) is actually a non-approved linguistic innovation, when referred to anything other than a massacre. It is, however, glossed by *Wypasiony słownik najmłodszej polszczyzny* (‘Supercool dictionary of the youngest Polish,’ Znak, Kraków 2003, p. 46), a dictionary of colloquial Polish, according to which it can also form adjectives and adverbs. See: ‘masakryczny,’ *Poradnia Językowa PWN*.  
<<https://sjp.pwn.pl/poradnia/haslo/masakryczny;6537.html>> [accessed 28 August 2020]

‘Organic food’ in Polish is called ‘ecological,’ as if related to environmental protection. Ecological or healthy, ‘you name it,’ you choose. But the two words are not synonyms, and the use of the adjective ‘ecological’ to refer to organic food has a short history in Polish. The word ‘ecology,’ from which ‘ecological’ is derived, was first coined by the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel as *Ökologie*, from the Greek *oikos* ‘house, dwelling place, habitation’ and *logia* ‘study of.’<sup>627</sup> In *Nieważkość*, it is in the organic, ‘ecological’ bistro where the conversation about the extinction of the species takes place. It is a topic of major concern for the company’s manager, a dedicated meat-eater who is just consuming an organic or ‘ecological’ gourmet pork, the production of which has little to do with environmental protection or the study of the species. Prosciutto, rather than illustrating pro-environmental concerns, acts as a sign of status, it marks the manager as an affluent, sophisticated, ‘cultured’ man who ‘peppers’ his arguments with foreign words here and there. Tellingly, the foreign ‘prosciutto wrap’ —already a linguistic loan from Italian, transported into English— is declined in the Polish text and does not appear in italics. The word order is Polish too: what in English is ‘prosciutto wrap’ becomes *wrap z prosciutto* in Polish – a ‘wrap with prosciutto.’ The foreign provenance of the expression, within the Polish text, is thus concealed, and the borders between the two languages blurred. In a way, it suggests that some languages, such as the ‘international’ English, have more chances to survive in the capitalist world.

When the borders between languages are blurred, as Zinkhahn asserts, a liminal space opens up in which new linguistic constructs and combinations are formed. Zinkhahn defines such linguistic ‘border zones’ in the following way:

I call these ‘ambivalent threshold spaces’ liminal spaces, based on the concept of liminality. [...] In these intermediate areas, transitions from one system to another take place; therefore, they have a high potential for change and innovation. [...] In these liminal spaces, syncretic and sometimes even autonomous language forms may emerge as a result of the reciprocal influence and blending of grammatical structures. Here, it is no longer clear where exactly the language border runs.<sup>628</sup>

One such linguistic liminal zone is the quasi-international corporate jargon used in Blue Arrow, such as *dobry staf* (‘good stuff,’ through the word ‘staf’ does not exist in Polish) or *outfity do fitnessu* (‘fitness class outfits,’ also non-existent). There are also examples of the merging of

<sup>627</sup> ‘Ecology,’ in *Etymological Dictionary Online* <<https://www.etymonline.com/word/ecology>> [accessed 28 August 2020]

<sup>628</sup> Zinkhahn Rhobodes, pp. 205-207.

borders in which foreign expressions are taken from English, but refer to non-Anglophone cultural concepts. For example, in the fragment we read that Zuzanna participates in a mindfulness session:

Zuzanna zajęła miejsce obok Rafała, który już siedział w pozycji półłotosu. – Jest moc – wyszeptał. Postukała się w głowę. [...] Instruktorka kazała im stanąć, poczuć grunt pod nogami. Złożyć ręce jak do modlitwy. – O tak – pokazała – na wysokości mostka. Czakra serca. Wasze wielkie współczucie. [...] – Ten czas jest dla was – mówiła. – Celebrujcie go. Matka ziemia przyciąga was do siebie. [...] Zuzanna próbowała „celebrować,” ale kiedy zamknęła oczy, natychmiast poczuła się bardzo zmęczona. [...] Sala znajdowała się na jedenastym piętrze biurowca, więc ziemia była bardzo, bardzo daleko. Zuzanna pomyślała o świeżo zaoranym polu, o przedwiośniu, ale to zaraz znikło. Za pięć dni leci do Aten.<sup>629</sup>

[Zuzanna took the spot next to Rafał, already seated in a half-lotus position. ‘The force is with us,’ he whispered. She scoffed. [...] The instructor ordered them to stand up, feel the ground beneath their feet. Take their hands to heart center, as if they were praying. ‘Like this’, she showed them. ‘At the level of the sternum. The chakra of the heart. Your great compassion.’ [...] ‘This is your time,’ she said. ‘Celebrate the moment. Mother Earth is calling you.’ [...] Zuzanna was trying to “celebrate,” but when she closed her eyes, she immediately felt tired. [...] The room was situated at the eleventh floor of an office building, and so the earth was far, far away. Zuzanna thought about a freshly ploughed field, about early spring, but the images soon disappeared. In five days she was flying to Athens.]

The passage, in its original version, gives the impression of a translated text. This impression stems from the fact that it contains multiple loans from English; the language of mindfulness training, breathing exercises and yoga is also signaled as foreign by Zuzanna’s comments and reactions, which point to the untowardness of appropriating elements of Buddhist philosophy and yoga exercise into the context of a multinational advertising company, stripped of its philosophical depth, of the awareness that all living beings are interconnected. With a boss arguing that the human domination on Earth is essential for animal survival, quoting Star Wars to sound younger, yet also linguistically and symbolically displaying his power, the practice of mindfulness, mediated at least in part through English, disconnected from its context, sounds strange to Zuzanna’s ear, like a “bad” translation. Building on those concerns, Zuzanna begins to question her own ‘rooted’ position and starts to feel uprooted, unbalanced, as if floating in a zero-gravity environment. (The sense of uprootedness, in *Nieważkość*, is also linked to the experience of sexual abuse that Zuzanna and other women protagonists suffered in childhood.)

<sup>629</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość*, pp. 22-23.

The mindfulness scene opens with Zuzanna entering the room and sitting down next to Rafał, who is sitting, for his part, in a half-lotus position. It does not seem coincidental – the half-lotus position is less demanding than a lotus position, which requires more fitness or yoga experience and is harder than the cross-legged position. In the fragment, situated in the space of in-betweenness, where corporate language is spoken and an ‘international’ culture fostered. When the company employees are instructed to take their hands to ‘heart center,’ ‘as if they were praying’ we seem to cross the boundary between work and religion, capitalism and spirituality. The chakra of the heart, spelled as *czakra*, does exist in Polish as a normatively approved word, but to what extent does it exist as a concept? Zuzanna struggles to focus, to ‘feel the ground beneath her feet,’ and her striving, apart from entailing an emotional battle with work-related anxiety, seems to reflect the confusion resulting from so many translations and cultural appropriations. She tries to imagine the ground, the ploughed field and the ‘early spring,’ *przedwiośnie*, a separate word in Polish, as though a fifth season, but she is distracted by the awareness of the distance that separates her from those almost fictional earthly roots. Is the ploughed field, with its patriarchal and rural connotations,<sup>630</sup> the ground in which she is “rooted”? Or is it the rootless—and indeed ruthless—advertising world that requires her to use art in order to advertise other products? The eleventh floor of the office building appears to represent an artificial, multicultural ‘no-place,’ utopian and dystopian at the same time, a corporate ivory tower, abysmally distant from any culturally-specific grounding. To complicate the matter further, Zuzanna is distracted by the loans from the English language that the instructor uses when she asks participants to ‘celebrate the moment.’ How does one celebrate a moment, Zuzanna seems to wonder, when in Polish “celebration” can only refer to a solemn

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<sup>630</sup> In *The King of the Fields*, for instance, Isaac Bashevis Singer uses the ploughed field as a metaphor of rape to deride the family-based concepts of community that are founded on the oppression of women. In a scene of a symbolic union between the court and the peasants; the king of the tribe of Polanians legitimizes the need for peace through a narrative of symbolically ‘opening’ the land, compared to a woman, which connotes injury or rape, in order to inseminate it/her: ‘Knieziu Cybulo, tyś ojciec Łaski, toś i mój ojciec. To ona mnie namówiła, by zawrzeć pokój. Leżała ze mną w łożu, szarpnęła za brodę i powiedziała: “Królu mój, chcę pokoju.” [...] Nasi nieprzyjaciele zarzucają nam, że obnażamy i otwieramy skórę ziemi, kiedy orzemy. Lecz my Polacy mówimy: “Ziemia jest jak dziewczyna: by zapłodnić ją nasieniem, trzeba ją otworzyć. Ziemia, jak kobieta, chce, by ją otworzyć, bo chce rodzić owoce.”’ [‘Prince Onion, you are the father of Grace, so you are my father too. She was the one to convince me to make peace. She lay in the bed with me, she pulled my beard and said “Oh my king, I want peace.” [...] Our enemies accuse us of stripping the land naked and opening its skin when we plough. But we the Poles say: “The land is like a maiden: to inseminate it with seeds you need to cut it open. The land, like the woman, wants to be opened, because it wants to yield fruit.”’] See: Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Opowieść o królu pól*, transl. by Tomasz Bieroń (Kraków: Wydawnictwo m, 1993), p. 50. Singer’s book is full of powerful and violent images, also of antisemitic and anti-Muslim violence. Violence, however, does not only appear as metaphor, Singer, like Fiedorczuk, also explicitly uses words such as rape, murder, or abuse, and depicts the characters’ physical and emotional suffering.

event or leading a religious ceremony?<sup>631</sup> What is the instructor trying to ‘translate’ culturally: the gesture of touching a ‘heart center’ as compared to the act of praying? Or perhaps the act of meditating itself?

Zuzanna scoffs at the instructor and in the end gives up, surrendering to the state of zero-gravity, with her thoughts drifting away from any particular ground. In the Polish original, she taps on her head to indicate that Rafał is acting crazy, or, perhaps to convey the general absurdity of the situation. ‘Tap yourself on the head,’ *puknij się w głowę*, a fixed phrase in Polish to tell someone that they are crazy, is a brief and direct expression. But to render it in English the flow of the narrative would be altered by a long and convoluted phrase such as ‘she tapped on her head to indicate that he was acting crazy.’ Tapping oneself on the head, touching the heart center, sitting in a (half) lotus position – the gestures in *Nieważkość* point to the cultural specificity of languages, but also of gestures. In so doing, Fiedorczuk hints not only at multilingualism, but also multimodality, involving different literacies or modes in the act of communication and indicating that the modes of communication traditionally researched by linguists go far beyond the “purely” linguistic. Halfway between Warsaw and Athens, in the air, where Zuzanna’s thoughts are travelling while she refuses to “feel the ground,” words attempt to break free from their roots, they travel and mingle between the dimensions of the past, the spring, the fields, and the present reality of a corporate, multinational firm. This linguistic wandering and crossing will soon take Zuzanna to Greece, to attend an art exhibition where she will try to convince a group of artists to cooperate with the marketing company she represents. In the next section, I look at Zuzanna’s encounter with different kinds of ‘outsider artists,’ especially with a disabled boy, who manages to stir up Zuzanna’s convictions regarding art, the artistic establishment, and communication.

### **The Man-Moth’s Claim: The (Un)Intelligible, the (Un)Grievable, the (In)Sane**

During one of the poetry-reading meetings run by Fiedorczuk and Gerardo Beltrán as part of the eco-poetic discussion group,<sup>632</sup> Fiedorczuk made a reference to Elizabeth Bishop’s figure of Man-Moth, which she deemed one of the most powerful metaphors in Bishop’s writing. The Man-Moth, a linguistic construct created as a result of a typographical error in a newspaper that

<sup>631</sup> ‘celebrować,’ in: *Słownik Języka Polskiego PWN* <<https://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/celebrować.html>> [accessed 28 August 2020]

<sup>632</sup> I refer to the monthly event called ‘Slow poetry’, a series of poetry-reading meetings run by Fiedorczuk and Beltrán in one of the Warsaw cafés in the years 2016-2017.

Bishop came across haphazardly, became a poetic figure of the outcast, a Man's shadow. The Man-Moth 'thinks the moon is a small hole at the top of the sky, | proving the sky quite useless for protection. | He trembles, but must investigate as high as he can climb.'<sup>633</sup> Unlike the Man-Moth, who always aspires to climb higher and higher, 'Man, standing below him, has no such illusions.'<sup>634</sup> The Man-Moth feels the moon's 'queer light on his hands, neither warm nor cold, | of a temperature impossible to record in thermometers.'<sup>635</sup> The 'queerness' of the Man-Moth's feelings of the world is of a piece with the perception that things are neither warm nor cold, neither black nor white – the Man-Moth's world-views go beyond, or perhaps across, established dichotomies. When travelling on a train, the Man-Moth 'always seats himself facing the wrong way | and the train starts at once at its full, terrible speed, | without a shift in gears or a gradation of any sort. | He cannot tell the rate at which he travels backwards.'<sup>636</sup> The Man-Moth feels disoriented, for he does not move in the "right" direction. In a certain sense, the Man-Moth appears to experience what Sara Ahmed refers to as 'disorientation': 'a bodily feeling can be unsettling, and it can shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground or one's belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel livable.'<sup>637</sup> The unsettling, but also at times productive feeling of disorientation is, according to Ahmed, an eminently 'queer' feeling.

If the idea of 'feeling queer' may apply not only to the LGBTQI community members, if it may be extended to embrace other non-normative bodies that are 'out of line,' as has been proposed by 'crip theorists,'<sup>638</sup> then it might also be opened up to language, the (re)conceptualization of the normative, the comfortable, the accommodating norm as well as its opposite: linguistic discomfort, awkwardness, "poor phrasing," the foreign, linguistically or culturally queer. The very existence of Man-Moth issues from an error – Bishop first imagined the poem after she came across a newspaper misprint for 'mammoth.'<sup>639</sup> The Man-Moth exists so

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<sup>633</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, 'The Man-Moth,' *Poetry Foundation* (1983)

<<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47537/the-man-moth>> [accessed 30 August 2020]

<sup>634</sup> Ibid.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid.

<sup>637</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 157.

<sup>638</sup> See: Robert McRuer, *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018), and: Ellen Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014). I would like to thank Professor Brad Epps for drawing my attention to the spatial, metaphoric intersections between the 'queer,' the 'crip,' and the 'eco.'

<sup>639</sup> Bishop, 'The Man-Moth.'



that the reader can perceive, perhaps experience “Man” from an upside-down, inverted perspective. Without the Man-Moth, the outcast, the stranger, the queer, there would be no space for the corrective power of the norm, as the norm can only be born out of the straightening efforts of selection and rejection. ‘Queer,’ ‘crip,’ or ‘eco’ all refer to place or space, to creating a home, but also to inhabiting a language.

Fiedorczuk sees the Man-Moth as a suggestion of potential similarity, perhaps even kinship between ‘Man’ and ‘Moth,’ as she writes in *Złożoność nie jest zbrodnią*:

można zatem przypuszczać, że pojawienie się Man-Motha mówi nam coś o naturze “Człowieka”, zwłaszcza że poprzez pisanie wyrazu “Man” wielką literą Bishop zwraca uwagę na zachodzące między nimi podobieństwo.<sup>640</sup>

[we may therefore presume that the appearance of the Man-Moth tells us something about the nature of ‘Man,’ especially because, by capitalizing the word ‘Man,’ Bishop underlines the likeness between them.]

The impossible alliance between a man and a moth draws the readers’ attention to the limits of possibility, signaling potential new ways for a queerly cross-species kinship. If in Bishop’s poem such unusual union question its own possibilities to exist symbolically, in Fiedorczuk’s stories, unusual alliances do occur at the level of feeling and experience, thus querying once again the role of the symbolic in the act of communication.

In Fiedorczuk’s narrative, numerous characters are inspired by the figure of the Man-Moth. Fiedorczuk represents linguistic and symbolic queerness, for example, by kinds of artistic expression regarded as unintelligible and thus inappropriate. In an underground art gallery in Athens (the Utopia from the first pages of this chapter), Zuzanna expects to meet with the artists whose works she had seen previously and which somehow ‘spoke’ to her. One of the artists especially attracts her attention, as his paintings disrupt the accepted ways of artistic communication: his name is Antonis Rapi. The only images the unknown artist produces are rows of numbers, in different colors and sequences. Zuzanna feels drawn to the images, and experiences eerie vibrations when she looks at them, although she does not understand the codes that the images presumably follow, nor, in fact, is she even certain that there is a code or pattern. Soon Zuzanna discovers that the author is a child who lives with a mental disability. Antoni does not communicate with anyone via any established language, but only through sequences of

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<sup>640</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Złożoność nie jest zbrodnią*, p. 36.

numbers. In a way, the character of Antoni destabilizes the communicability of the image; he does not produce images that communicate referentially, and yet he manages to ‘connect’ with Zuzanna, which startles her. While wandering around the city and negotiating prices with the gallery owner, Zuzanna engages in a text-message quarrel with her boss Rafał whose idea of ‘collaborating’ with the artists or using their work for advertising she had earlier questioned. She convinces Rafał to buy Rapi’s paintings and to display them in a gallery, in an attempt, perhaps, to “give voice” to Antoni, whether or not his message will prove “intelligible” to the majority of the public.

In *Nieważkość*, the exhibition where Zuzanna meets Antoni is called ‘Visions of the outside,’ which alludes to the term “outsider artists.” The attempts to engage critically the figure of the outsider in Polish museums and galleries have a relatively short history, one recent example being the exhibition ‘Why We Have Wars,’ hosted at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in 2016. The curators of the exhibition, Zofia Płoska and Katarzyna Karwańska, defined the notion of an artistic outsider as follows:

Who are outsiders? They are people who operate outside the contemporary art circulation – individuals without a degree in arts, without affiliation to institutions, the market and the conventions of the art world. The approach of such artists is a factor that distinguishes them also in the broader landscape of the so-called non-professional art in Poland, because they mostly tend to pursue their creative practice to manifest opposition and dissent. They are also “outsiders” in the traditional understanding of the term – individualists, often perceived as “different” (sometimes because of their distinct interests and unconventional way of life, sometimes because of disability or illness), who may even live on the margins of the society (such as homeless or incarcerated people.)<sup>641</sup>

The terms ‘outsider’ and ‘naive art’ are, of course, problematic (as the curators themselves explained during multiple events that accompanied the exposition), for, in enumerating reasons why people may be cast outside, the gallerists and art managers seem to overlook the systemic nature of exclusion, not to mention the repeated undermining of various types of ‘uncultured’ creators, such as folk artists, from the artistic establishment.

The interaction with Antoni leads Zuzanna to reflect on the processes of visual and linguistic communication with which she engages. While on her journey to Athens, Zuzanna remains in

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<sup>641</sup> Katarzyna Karwańska, Zofia Płoska, ‘Po co wojny są na świecie,’ curatorial text  
<<https://artmuseum.pl/en/wystawy/po-co-wojny-sa-na-swiecie>> [accessed 20 August 2020]

contact with her manager. ‘Jestem na miejscu’<sup>642</sup> (‘I’m here,’) she texts him as soon as she arrives at the hotel, then she sends her mother ‘Pozdrowienia z Aten’<sup>643</sup> (‘Greetings from Athens.’) Time, for her, stands still, as she lies down on a hotel bed, while the replies pop up on her phone screen. The difference of pace between everyday life back in Poland, mediated through digital communications, and the rhythm of Zuzanna’s day in Athens is marked from the first lines of the chapter. While on the road, Zuzanna sends out one-sentence messages and snapshots of buildings, museums, etc.; she photographs her feet covered in dust while on her way to the Acropolis. The images travel, more quickly than Zuzanna can describe them; they cross borders following digital paths, as if alluding to the broader questions regarding communication in which Fiedorczuk is interested. In one of her essays, tellingly entitled ‘Nostalgia’, Fiedorczuk reflects on the changes in communication before and after social media, changes which make her early recollections of the world radically different from her daughter’s. She writes of the existence of two worlds, ‘before’ and ‘after’ writing letters became obsolete, as if those worlds were two different countries:

Ładna papeteria była w latach 80. prawdziwym skarbem i właśnie taki nostalgiczny skarb chciałam pewnie dać córce, zapominając, że pochodzi ze świata, do którego ona nie ma żadnego dostępu (podobnie jak ja nigdy nie będę tubylcem, a najwyżej gościem w kraju Snapchata).<sup>644</sup>

A nice decorative stationery was a real treasure in the eighties, so I probably wanted to give such nostalgic gift to my daughter, but I forgot that it comes from a world to which she has no access whatsoever (just like I will never be the native, only a guest in the country of Snapchat.)

The realm of Snapchat, of instant, fleeting messages, appears here as another country, one in which a different language is spoken and that has its ‘native speakers’ and foreign guests. But in the novel *Nieważkość*, Zuzanna problematizes communication not only in the light of recent, digital changes, but also with an eye to exploring the changes in the relations between message and medium, be it an image, a sound, or a written text.

The figure of Antoni Rapi, the boy who painted numbers, perhaps alludes to the ‘rational’ limits or boundaries that attempt to regulate both social interactions and cultural production, even

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<sup>642</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość*, p. 138.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

<sup>644</sup> Fiedorczuk, ‘Nostalgia’, *Przekrój* (August 2018) <<https://przekroj.pl/artykuly/felietony/nostalgia-julia-fiedorczuk>> [accessed 2 September 2020]

as it questions the opposition between, on one side, reason, mind and articulate language and, on the other, irrationality, matter, and unintelligible blabber. Antoni is one of many of Fiedorczuk's child outsiders. In Fiedorczuk last novel *Pod słońcem*, a boy, Jurek Bułka, suffers from persistent anxiety, which he confesses to his new girlfriend: 'Nie wiem, po co żyję, chodzę po ziemi, oddycham, jem, patrzę na wschody i zachody słońca, skoro to wszystko zmierza tylko do...' <sup>645</sup> ('I do not know why I live, walk on Earth, breathe, eat, look at sunsets and sunrises, if all this only leads to...') Fearful of where he is going, the girl misunderstands and rejects him. On the next day, he participates in the slaughter of a calf, which he does not really understand either. By night time, he is already dead: he hangs himself from a tree.

Child suicide as a result of social rejection is an important motif in Fiedorczuk's work – in *Nieważkość*, a mentally disabled boy kills himself too. The boy's death proves so traumatic for Helena, a girl who had rejected him, as well as for her friend Zuzanna, that, after the body is discovered, the two girls never discuss it. Shortly thereafter, Zuzanna moves to Warsaw and the two never speak to each other again. The 'abnormal', 'different,' rejected child becomes a foreclosed subject, someone never to be spoken about, doubling down, as if, on the traumatic breakdown in communication.

The intertwined themes of madness and non-communication, especially regarding women and children, tend to appear in Fiedorczuk's texts in relation to violence. Women who do not communicate intelligibly, whose sanity is questioned, have often experienced some form of abuse. Such is the case of Zetka, a collector of scrap, another outsider in *Bliskie kraje*. Zetka stumbles upon a squirrel hit by a car; while waiting for the squirrel to die, she remembers various situations in which her own status as a dignified subject was denied – when she was bullied at school, sexually harassed, thrown out of her home and, eventually, raped. Although the rape is only suggested in the story, it is nonetheless conveyed as an unspeakable element that cannot be fully recalled, much less communicated directly:

Po podstawówce Zetka poszła do zawodówki uczyć się na krawcową [...]. Coś się tam jednak stało, w szkole, po szkole, za szkołą, w lasku za szkołą, coś się stało, coś takiego, że Zetka teraz pogwizduje głośniej i maszeruje szybciej, i nie będzie, nie będzie o tym myślała. [...] Ubrań nie potrzebowała, bo od tamtego zdarzenia za szkołą nie chciała już

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<sup>645</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Pod słońcem*, p. 229.

więcej być kobietą i cały ten cyrk z przebieraniem się przestał ją po prostu interesować.<sup>646</sup>

[After primary school, Zetka attended a vocational school to become a seamstress [...]. But something happened there, at school, after school, in the woods behind the school, something happened, something that makes Zetka whistle louder now, she is walking faster and she will not, she will not think about it. [...] She [doesn't] need any clothes, because since that event behind the school building she [doesn't] want to be a woman anymore, all that paraphernalia of dressing up simply ceased to interest her.]

The radical shift in Zetka's appearance and life occurs afterwards, although it seems predetermined in her memory. Zetka remembers always having felt 'different' or 'other,' disoriented and out of place. Nor does she know why she is called Zetka – which is not a name, but rather 'chodziło o ostatnią literę alfabetu. To by się zgadzało, bo Zetka była, rzeczywiście, jakaś taka... ostatnia. Już w podstawówce [...] wszyscy wiedzieli, że Zetka to ta, ta, ta... odmienna,'<sup>647</sup> ('the last letter of the alphabet, "z" [...]. That would make sense, because Zetka was, indeed, somehow... last. Already in primary school [...] everyone knew that Zetka was, was, was... other.')

Tellingly, it is the 'insane,' the 'other,' the queer who raise uncomfortable questions about communicability and 'humanity.' Zetka uses the language queerly, in a disorienting, unsettling way. When she finds the dead squirrel on the road, she communicates her care for the animal in a way that could hardly be seen as 'cultured,' normative or 'literary': 'Pierdolił cię samochód, mała,'<sup>648</sup> ('A car screwed you over, little one.') Zetka wants to pick the squirrel up, but she is afraid of being bitten, so she hesitates, and adds: 'Skurwysyny w dupę jebane,'<sup>649</sup> ('Sons of a bitch, fuck them in the ass,') with reference to the drivers. It is no coincidence that she has recourse to sexist and homophobic insults – the othering force of language is thus depicted as an ever-returning, ghostly presence. Through her insulting words, she interpellates the drivers as objects of verbal abuse, she is using abusive language and at the same time, she is being 'used' by the language without knowing it. Simultaneously, as if in contrast, she shows compassion to the squirrel, even though it cannot be helped. Zetka stands in the middle of a highway, waving her hands, trying to ward the cars off and to 'nadać tej sytuacji jakieś pozory godności,'<sup>650</sup> ('give

<sup>646</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, pp. 226–227.

<sup>647</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 224.

<sup>648</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 222.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid.

<sup>650</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 223.

the whole situation a semblance of dignity.’) She feels compelled to ‘jej uratować... śmierć, bo przecież nie życie,’<sup>651</sup> (‘save its... death, not its life, clearly.’) To ‘save the squirrel’s death,’ for Zetka, means to grieve – she finally manages to move the squirrel to the side of the road and stay with it until it dies. Then, she buries it or, more precisely, ‘ukrywa ciało za sporym krzakiem dzikiej róży. Przysypuje liśćmi, obok kładzie te dwie gałązki, na krzyż. Po chwili zmienia zdanie i kładzie je równolegle, jedną obok drugiej,’<sup>652</sup> (‘hides the body behind a large bush of wild roses. She covers it with leaves, and places two branches next to it, in a cross. Then she changes her mind and places one branch parallel to the other.’) With her gestures, Zetka is performing a communicative act, although not linguistically. She is certainly not communicating *with* the squirrel, nor protecting the squirrel’s wellbeing, rather, Zetka’s gesture may be interpreted as a statement on burial as part of symbolic superiority of certain humans over other, less grievable lives. Religious rituals constitute a “language” of their own; they are typically reserved for humans, for certain humans, that is, those who, for instance, do not willingly end their lives or spend them homeless, “discarded” and discounted by “productive” society. Burials constitute, after all, a symbolic, semiotic framework that delimits and enforces the definition of who and what is ‘human,’ ‘dignified,’ worthy not only of protection, but also of respect.

In *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, Judith Butler ask whether Antigone’s death ‘signal a necessary lesson about the limits of cultural intelligibility, the limits of intelligible kinship, one that restores us to our proper sense of limit and constraint.’<sup>653</sup> This question could be taken further if we asked to what extent a perceived kinship between a human and a hedgehog could sanction the hedgehog’s burial, and what are the conditions under which a hedgehog’s life could be grievable, how it could be communicated symbolically. Fiedorczuk’s story does not seem to offer an answer to this question. Indeed, it could be argued that Zetka experiences her own life as non-grievable. She earns her living, as noted, by collecting scrap, and she inhabits an old, abandoned house where she keeps all the objects she has found and that allows her to live ‘jak człowiek’<sup>654</sup> (‘like a person,’) as she says. Her only companion is a dog, who stays in the house and waits for her while she goes on her walks in search of objects that she could reuse. Her

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<sup>651</sup> Ibid.

<sup>652</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 225.

<sup>653</sup> See: Judith Butler, *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), eBook, p. 29

<[https://ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=74612&site=ehost-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp\\_29](https://ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=74612&site=ehost-live&scope=site&ebv=EB&ppid=pp_29)> [accessed 20 June 2021]

<sup>654</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 224.

house contains old magazines that she has collected, a faded rug, some old, plastic chairs and a drawer full of colorful threads and pieces of fabric<sup>655</sup> – she effectively recycles the detritus of consumer society to sustain her own existence. But when she comes back home, after finding the squirrel on the road, she finds that her house has burned down, and that her dog has gone missing. The people look away when she passes by, as if to suggest that, just as her, her home was made of garbage, disposable. It would be ‘out of place’ for her to mourn her home, her dog, just as it was ‘inappropriate’ to decorate the squirrel’s grave with a cross, and so Zetka refuses to mourn. She ‘Po prostu usiądzie, zdejmie buty i będzie się przyglądała swoim stopom o podeszwach popękanych jak wysuszona glina,’<sup>656</sup> (‘will simply sit down, take off her shoes and look at her feet, with the soles as cracked as dry soil,’) her body blending into the dust and ashes of ungrievable matter.

There is an undeniable queerness to Fiedorczuk’s homeless characters, especially in the language they use. Ewka, another homeless character who bears the Biblical name of Eve, the first woman, uses inappropriate language and that causes an unsettling effect. Ewka appears both in *Nieważkość* and in Fiedorczuk’s collection of short stories *Bliskie kraje*. From *Nieważkość* we find out that she suffered bullying, sexual abuse, and neglect as a child. In *Bliskie kraje* it is suggested that her mother, Maria, was raped as a child, and that she later had mental health problems; like Zetka, Maria also collected scrap. As mentioned in Chapter One, the title of the short stories ‘close lands’ alludes to the internal others or ‘foreigners’ of one’s country, which Ewka, among others, queries and illustrates. In *Nieważkość*, Ewka wanders around urban gardens, looking for an abandoned chalet to spend the night when she meets one of the ‘righteous’ residents, a neatly dressed woman with a bucket of flowers. ‘Ale... pani tu nie może,’<sup>657</sup> (‘But miss... you can’t... not in here...,’) the woman says. She is the owner of another chalet, and so, as property-owner she, unlike Ewka, is entitled to stroll along the garden paths. ‘Czemu kurwa nie może?’, zapytała Ewka przytomnie. ‘Otwarte było, to weszłam.’ ‘Jak pani mówi’, oburzyła się kobieta. ‘Po co tak przeklinać?’<sup>658</sup> (‘Why the fuck can’t I?, asked Ewka soberly. The door was open, so I entered. Why are you speaking like this?, the woman is appalled. Why do you have to swear?’)

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<sup>655</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 230.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid.

<sup>657</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość*, p. 237.

<sup>658</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość*, p. 237.

The property owner with her “cultured”, “proper” language starts to explain to Ewka that, as owners of the chalets, they need to ‘protect order,’ and proceeds to call security. The guard arrives and speaks to Ewka in what he probably considers ‘her language’: ‘Ej, wypierdalaj stąd,’<sup>659</sup> (‘Hey, get the fuck out of here,’) he says. The female property owner protests: ‘Ale tak nie można mówić, proszę pana [...] To przecież też jest człowiek,’<sup>660</sup> (‘But sir, you cannot speak like this. This is also a human.’) In the eyes of the woman, Ewka is not simply a human, but rather also-a-human, she seems to belong to a separate category of persons. The also-humans, who swear, are not welcome in gardens, they do not ‘fit in.’

Ewka reappears in one of the short stories in *Bliskie kraje*. In the story, Ewka is once again portrayed as a non-normative, disorienting and unsettling presence, but this time her gender is emphasized in a way that does not fit neatly into a normative version of womanhood. Her gender expression is represented as disorienting, as if she did not ‘speak’ the codes of heteronormative femininity fluently enough. While wandering around the city, Ewka sees two men, one of whom smiles at her. The third-person narrator then asks whether Ewka is, in fact, a woman:

Ci mężczyźni mieli piwo. Każdy miał swoją puszkę piwa. A jeden z nich uśmiechnął się na widok Ewki. Na widok kobiety? Ale czy Ewka była kobietą? Oto pytanie. Czy ktoś taki jak Ewka, ktoś, o kim ludzie dobrej woli mówili czasem, że to przecież też człowiek, czy ta Ewka, teżczłowiek, czy był/była kobietą? Dresowe spodnie [...], których nie zdejmowała od miesiąca – czy były spodniami kobiety? [...] A rude włosy z siwymi pasemkami, przyklejone do głowy na tuszcz i spięte fioletową frotką? [...] Czy zapach Ewki był zapachem kobiety?<sup>661</sup>

[Those men had beer. Each had his own can of beer. And one of them smiled when he saw Ewka. When he saw a woman? But was Ewka a woman? That is the question. Was someone like Ewka, someone of whom the well-intentioned people sometimes said that, after all, she is also a human, was this Ewka, this also-a-human, was he/she a woman? Were her sweatpants [...], which she had not taken off for a month, the sweatpants of a woman? [...] What about her ginger hair, glued to the head with grease and tied with a purple scrunchie? [...] Was Ewka’s smell the smell of a woman?]

Ewka uses her smell to protect herself against potential violence, she does not make efforts to incarnate any of the models of ‘feminine beauty,’ yet she still ‘cites’ them by not adhering to them. She is a woman though she is not a conventional ‘sexual object,’ all of which makes her dangerously ambiguous, ‘disoriented,’ queer. According to Ahmed, ‘feeling queer’ is ‘not about

<sup>659</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość*, p. 237.

<sup>660</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość*, p. 239.

<sup>661</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 149.



assimilation or resistance, *but about inhabiting norms differently*. (...) Queer feelings are “affected” by the repetition of the scripts that they fail to reproduce, and this “affect” is also a sign of what queer can do (...).’<sup>662</sup>

Indeed, it is as if Ewka spoke a different language and adhered to a different code of gender, as if she were dwelling in the borderland, constantly transgressing the cultural norms that undergird a binary sex/gender system. Willingly or not, Ewka both queries and queers the very idea of ‘woman,’ and in so doing, queries and queers feminisms that understand ‘woman’ as the exclusive and self-evident subject, and object, of feminism. In Judith Butler’s words,

If one “is” a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pre-gendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constructed identities.<sup>663</sup>

Women are, thus, to paraphrase Luce Irigaray, the “sex” that is not “one,” not only, as Irigaray argues, because women’s experiences often remain unspeakable,<sup>664</sup> her sexual pleasure cannot be totalized and reduced to phallic terms, or, as Marçal puts it, is abolished from the language, but also because the category of ‘woman’ is always already intersectional. Butler places “person” in quotation marks, thus pointing to the already gendered cultural construction of personhood, a term that remits, as is well known, to *persona*, a mask used in theatrical representations. A person ‘as such,’ is already gendered from the moment of birth. For Butler,

Gender norms operate by requiring an embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, ones that are almost always related to the idealization of the heterosexual bond. In this sense, the initiatory performative, ‘It’s a girl!’ [pronounced at birth] anticipates the eventual arrival of the sanction ‘I pronounce you man and wife.’ [...] This is a ‘girl,’ however, who is compelled to ‘cite’ the norm in order to qualify and remain a

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<sup>662</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 155. Within the spaces designed to accommodate queer there is of course, space for discomfort, a space for queer not to feel ‘queer enough’ or to fail to incarnate the “ideal” of queer. Such failure, as Ahmed claims, ‘the failure to be non-normative is then not the failure of queer to be queer, but the sign of attachments that are the condition of possibility for queer.’ The spaces designed to accommodate queer differ, they are subject to particularity. The very existence, and status, of such places, differs too. Here, however, I am using ‘queer’ as a disorienting category of straight, not to suggest that queer in itself does not also contain complex dynamics of comfort and discomfort.

<sup>663</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 6.

<sup>664</sup> See: Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter, Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).

viable subject.<sup>665</sup>

Indeed, with a simple gesture by one of the men, who shares his beer with Ewka, her ‘femininity’ is suddenly ‘confirmed’ through the suggestion of a heterosexual bond:

Noo, to rozumiem – powiedziała Ewka i roześmiała się pięknym, choć nieco zachrypniętym śmiechem młodej dziewczyny uwięzionej w cuchnącym ciele teżczlowieka. [...] – Jaaa nie mogę, ale amant – powiedział drugi.<sup>666</sup>

Nooow we’re talking – said Ewka and chuckled with a beautiful, although slightly husky giggle of a young girl trapped in a body of also-a-human. [...] – Good God, what a Casanova – said the other man.]

Ewka suddenly feels desired, feels that she is an *object* of desire and thus that she is a “real” woman, because such “reality” is itself the effect of an array of norms that define ‘woman.’ If she is a woman, she can then also be a person, a human, ‘trapped in a body of an also-human.’ Ewka’s body, almost against her will, cites the gendering norms: wearing long hair and a violet scrunchie, and bearing the established feminine name Ewka, yet she also refracts normative femininity. Like a Man-Moth, Ewka has no comfortable space of her own, no *oikos* or ‘home,’ she is queerly committed to living in an ‘oblique world,’ without a universally intelligible code of expression. Like Butler,<sup>667</sup> Fiedorczuk invites her readers to ask themselves what lives, voices, and stories are intelligible and why, and what lives, thus, are sufficiently livable to be grieved when they die, or to be preserved from dying. In *Nieważkość*, Ewka’s story ends when she falls asleep on a park bench and is burned alive, set on fire by a passerby, as if she were a piece of garbage. Ewka thus symbolically turns into a burnt offering, “sacrificed” to ‘purify’ the world from her ambiguous, disorienting presence which, unintelligible as it is, is not mourned, except, perhaps, by the reader and the author.

In a manner that accentuates her oblique position or orientation, Ewka effectively lives across time, out of sync with the ‘common’ rhythms of ‘productive,’ working society. Indeed, many other characters in Fiedorczuk’s stories also do not fit the diurnal and nocturnal routines of capitalism. The short story ‘Strefa unikania’ (‘Zone of Avoidance’) is dedicated to anonymous workers of a warehouse, who wake up ‘o czwartej czterdzieści cztery, minutę przed budzikiem,

<sup>665</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>666</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 150.

<sup>667</sup> See: Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: the Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006).

trzy godziny i minutę przed wschodem słońca,’<sup>668</sup> (‘at four forty four, a minute before the alarm clock, three hours and one minute before the sunrise.’) The hours in the story are never full hours: the main character, whose name is never given, perhaps to convey his role as “everyman,” “any man”, or “no-man”, any worker that takes a train at 5:45, for the journey that takes twenty seven minutes. He reaches the final stop and crosses a town at which he has just arrived – everything is still closed, the town is still fast asleep, except for Starbucks, where people pay exorbitant prices for a cup of coffee, because they ‘skończyli właściwe studia, znaleźli odpowiednią pracę i wzięli swój los we własne ręce,’<sup>669</sup> (‘graduated from the right university, found the appropriate job and took their fate in their own hands.’) The nameless protagonist, in contrast, ‘należy do tych, którzy nie skończyli, nie znaleźli nie wzięli. Dlatego przemyka przez miasto przed świtem, dyskretnie, jakby sama jego obecność naruszała jakieś niepisane prawo,’<sup>670</sup> (‘is one of those who did not graduate, find the appropriate job, or take their fate in their own hands. Which is why he is sneaking through the city before dawn, discreetly, as if his mere presence was violating some unspoken law.’) The employees of the warehouse “translate” their everyday reality into numbers, the language of serialized productivity, they address each other only with nicknames and communicate largely with swearwords. The narration can be described as free indirect speech,<sup>671</sup> in which a third-person narrator follows the perspective of one of the workers, nicknamed Astronom (Astronomer) who interacts with the other warehouse workers. ‘Spierdalaj, Naplet,’<sup>672</sup> (‘Fuck off, Foreskin,’) he says as he greets one of them. They seem to be good friends. Astronom adds some more insults to express comradeship: ‘— Goń się, pedale. Przybijają piątkę. Lubi Napleta, jest wesół, pracuje sumiennie,’<sup>673</sup> (“‘Fuck off, faggot.” They give each other a high five. He likes Foreskin, he is cheerful and works conscientiously.’) Like other characters in Fiedorczuk’s works who do not feel included in the group of the ‘cultured,’ the successful, who ‘graduated, found the right job...’ and settled down comfortably, the warehouse workers constantly insult each other, which, in conjunction with the rather elegant and ‘literary’ language of the narration, causes a dissonance, as if a foreign, untranslated word had suddenly been introduced into the text. Different registers, of course, signify different things.

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<sup>668</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 25.

<sup>669</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 27.

<sup>670</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 27.

<sup>671</sup> As defined in: Robert Humphrey, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, c1954).

<sup>672</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 27.

<sup>673</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 28.

When Astronom thinks about the night sky, while walking in the snow, the narration becomes reflexive and poetic:

Idąc po gładkiej puszystej powierzchni, czuje się, jakby był pierwszym człowiekiem, który kiedykolwiek stąpał po świecie, jakby świat został stworzony dopiero przed chwilą. Gwiazdy na czystym niebie są na wyciągnięcie ręki; trudno uwierzyć, że część z nich już nie istnieje, że zostało tylko światło, komunikat wysłany miliony lat temu, ale nadal aktualny, coś jak bardzo silna wola życia.<sup>674</sup>

[When walking on the smooth, frothy surface, he feels as if he were the first man to ever have stepped into the world, as if the world had been created just now. The stars in the clear sky are at his fingertips; hard to believe that some of them do not exist anymore, that there is only light left, a message sent millions of years before, but still relevant, like a very strong will to live.]

The will to live is here related to the ability to send a message – in this case, a message of light, unintelligible to humans. But in the human world, it seems that one's ability to communicate, to give an account of oneself in an intelligible way, is indeed related, and very powerfully so, to the ability to survive. The only character about whom we know nothing, and who does not communicate, is represented, from the outset, as unworthy of describing: 'Ostatni, Zmrol, jest zwykłym ochlapusem, nie ma żadnej ciekawej historii,'<sup>675</sup> ('The last one of them, Zmrol, is simply a drunkard, he has no interesting backstory.') Zmrol barely speaks. By the end of the story, we find out that he fell off a roof, an event that elicits no comments. As a result, his uncommunicated and perhaps uncommunicable life leaves no trace, and just as he has no "back story," he will have, it appears, no "after story," no account of grief, once he dies. As with Ewka and the squirrel, their death is also shrouded in unintelligibility.

In contrast with the 'literary' passages describing the stars, the passages that relate to everyday life are written in a colloquial register, for instance: 'Nie wychodzą na dwór, bo wszystko co potrzebne jest w środku: szatnia, palarnia, stołówka i sracz,'<sup>676</sup> ('They do not go out because all they need is inside: the cloakroom, the smoking area, the canteen and the shitter.') The constant shifts of register are dizzying, as if there were two realities – that of the outside world, which the workers never see (yet is present, as if written in a book), and that which takes place inside the warehouse, in which they participate. The reality of the city "out there" that the

<sup>674</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 26.

<sup>675</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 28.

<sup>676</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 29.

workers traverse at dawn is as distant and unavailable to them as the nearby galaxies. In fact, it is not by coincidence that the story is titled ‘Zone of Avoidance,’ which, in astronomy, refers to a region where no galaxies are visible due to the obscuring effects of the Milky Way, which conceals the neighbouring galaxies with its light.<sup>677</sup>

Some of the workers, like a man nicknamed Profesor (‘Professor’), come from abroad. Profesor, who came from Donetsk, used to be a professor in Ukraine ‘before the war’ – here Fiedorczuk plays with words, for ‘before the war,’ with no clarification, in Polish usually refers to World War II. But in the story, ‘the war,’ appears to refer to the ongoing war in Donbass. We find out that the professor left his family in Donetsk and that he ‘wysła im diengi, czyli groszi,’ (‘sends them *diengi*, which means *groszi*.’)<sup>678</sup> The professor understands Polish, but the other workers speak Russian to him. The narrator’s quote or ‘translation,’ from transcribed Russian into transcribed Ukrainian, seems to suggest the absurdity of the situation: the speakers of Polish use Russian to communicate with a Ukrainian colleague, who is willing to communicate in Polish, yet, probably in an attempt to make him feel included, they insist on linguistically marking him as foreign. It is telling that the person who fled the war provoked by pro-Russian separatists and supported by Russia, is still addressed in Russian. As is often the case in Fiedorczuk’s texts, multilingual insertions are by no means innocent or conciliatory, especially when used as political or identity tools, by which entire languages become signifiers in their own right.

Fiedorczuk’s only characters that could be described as queer in the literal sense of the expression (they are a lesbian couple, although, after publishing their story, the writer insisted it was not a ‘lesbian novel’)<sup>679</sup> are also the ones that speak the most ‘literary’ language, again, to the point of unintelligibility. Fiedorczuk’s first novel, *Biała Ofelia* (‘The White Ophelia,’ 2011) revolves around the lives of two women, who used to be childhood friends. As adults, one of them, Eliza, works as a writer and the other, Anna, spends endless hours reading Eliza’s texts. The women engage in a passionate and self-destructive lesbian romance. Anna’s character dialogues with the Shakespearean Ophelia – a woman madly in love, consumed by the passion that leads her to self-denial and self-destruction. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia sings songs with no

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<sup>677</sup> ‘Zone of Avoidance,’ in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* <<https://www.britannica.com/science/zone-of-avoidance>> [accessed 14 September 2020]

<sup>678</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Bliskie kraje*, p. 28.

<sup>679</sup> ‘Biała Ofelia,’ *culture.pl* <<https://culture.pl/pl/dzielo/julia-fiedorczuk-biala-ofelia>> [accessed 20 July 2021]

discernible referential meaning and talks about plants, which she gives to everyone. She only reserves one plant to herself: the rue, an abortive plant, as if, with this gesture, she were renouncing the imperative to reproduce, and, moreover, to reproduce the heteronormative model of family. The symbol of the rue, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is prominent in Marçal's *La germana, l'estrangera* most notably in relation to the topic of abortion. Fiedorczuk's 'white Ophelia,' for her part, opts for embracing literature, an 'anti-reproductive' desire, and for renouncing the heteronormative version of 'family.' The "madness" of a feminine pleasure that does not issue in reproduction is linked to the pleasure of reading and writing, but also dialogues, as noted, with Ophelia's 'mad' or non-referential language of colors and plants, perhaps in an attempt to seek more oblique and heterogeneous ways of creating meaning. Like Ophelia, Anna refuses communicability; instead of abandoning language, she abandons herself to it. The exact sequence of the plot becomes unclear as the character begins to speak with quotes. Eliza does not understand Anna, so she starts avoiding her. After the last, failed attempt to meet with (or should I say stalk) Eliza in Vienna, Anna loses her mind. She wanders along the streets of Vienna alone. What seem to be her thoughts appear in italics, as if to indicate their quasi-poetic "foreignness":

*Wszystko jest mokre, nawet moje włosy. I światła samochodów, kuleczki ze srebra, odbijają się w moich oczach, które są mokre. Oczarowałeś moje serce, siostrze. [...] Będę cię szukać wszędzie i donikąd. Tak ciepło, zdejmę płaszcz. [...] Mokre miasto faluje gdy jestem jak lilia w dobrym domu wina. Moje białe płatki... otwieram dom wiosny, siostrze. Otwieram dom wiosny. Wilgotna gwiazda, żądząca państwami Neptuna, dla ciebie. Cieszyć się będziemy i weselić tobą, kiedy ta siła... jestem ciężka, siostrze.*<sup>680</sup>

*[Everything is drenched, even my hair. And car lights, little silver balls are reflected in my eyes, which are damp. You have stolen my heart, sister. [...] I will look for you everywhere and nowhere. It is so warm, I will take off my coat. [...] The wet city waves up and down while I am a lily in the good vineyard. My white petals... I open the house of spring, my sister. I open the house of spring. The damp star that rules the countries of Neptune, for you. We rejoice and delight in you, while this force... I feel heavy, my sister.]*

Passages from the Song of Songs ('You have stolen my heart, sister,' 'I am a lily,' 'We rejoice and delight in you') mix with Anna's thoughts in a stream-of-consciousness monologue. Anna's hair is damp, like Ophelia's when she drowns. It is unclear whether Anna survives or drowns as well in the nearby river. In any case, she disappears as an individual and becomes text, her words mingling with the words of others. It is suggested that, perhaps, she was never 'real,' but a

<sup>680</sup> Julia Fiedorczuk, *Biała Ofelia* (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2011) p. 171.

character written by Eliza. In some aspects she is not unlike Renée Vivien who, in Marçal's novel, is consumed by her passion for Natalie Barney and who melts into her suffering and begins to see 'life' as 'literature,' body as text, contesting, in the process, their status as separate concepts.

In this section, I have explored the links between the (un)intelligible, the (un)grievable and the queer codes of expression as experiences, lives and accounts oriented differently, or disoriented, following directions other than 'straight,' 'straightforward' or 'right.' These 'queer', 'oblique' and 'disoriented' or 'disorienting' characters in Fiedorczuk's texts often express themselves in ways that mix or cross the boundaries between normative and non-normative codes, between the 'cultured' and the 'uncultured,' the linguistic and the non-linguistic. As subjects that move across borders, that inhabit, albeit provisionally, borderlands and in-between spaces, they often lack contours or boundaries of their own or they have been cast into realms into which they do not fit. In so doing, those characters question, in their comings and goings, the established or 'common' definitions of the 'normative,' the 'human,' the 'symbolic' or the 'rational.' The lack of protective boundaries or intelligible definitions results in their increased vulnerability. Some, like Zetka, decide to inhabit their materiality. Others opt for abandoning corporeal material and proceed to blend into the text, to make it their home. Like Fiedorczuk's Ofelia, Marçal's Vivien and Sara T. also attempt to blend into a text, blend with the other – a desire that, albeit utopian, affects their attitude towards languages and language mixing.

### **'Desig sense baranes': Writing as Passion, Passion as Desire and Suffering**

Throughout her work, Marçal underlines the links between obsession, writing, and the annihilation of the self, which she links to the social exclusion that her protagonist, Renée Vivien, experienced as a lesbian woman writer. The passion, in Vivien, means desire, but also suffering and rebellion. In *La passió*, Sara T. describes Vivien as:

La Revolta encarnada, he dit més amunt. És l'excès del concepte que s'apodera del cos, allò que el converteix en vida sofrent, en passió? És només l'esforç ingent i fallit del cos per coincidir punt per punt amb la paraula, cobrir amb vida, matèria, segons, minuts i hores, tota la seva extensió immaterial, fora del temps?<sup>681</sup>

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<sup>681</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, p. 104.

[Revolt incarnate, I have ventured above. Is it the excess of this concept taking over the body that turns it into a life of suffering, into passion? Is it simply the enormity of this failed effort by the body to coincide in every way with the word, to cover with life, matter, seconds, minutes and hours the entirety of tis immaterial extension, beyond time?]<sup>682</sup>

Similarly to Sara T., her literary alter ego, Marçal admits to substitute an amorous passion with an obsessive interest in Vivien. Marçal perceives Vivien as rebellious and ‘autonomous’ and, at the same time, as vulnerable, given her obsessive ways of experiencing desire:

Renée Vivien em va fascinar per la seva vida anticonformista, per la seva afirmació del amor cap a una altra dona [...]. Però també em va fascinar perquè era algú que vivia l’amor amb una intensitat inusitada, un amor sistemàticament turmentat [...] i jo volia deixar enrere una etapa de la meua vida caracteritzada pels amors turmentats. Fixeu-vos en l’aparent contrasentit. D’altra banda, he seguit els passos de Renée Vivien amb veritable passió. És com si hagués substituït l’obsessió amorosa per una persona per l’obsessió per un fantasma. [...] Totes dues, val a dir-ho, mentre han estat actives, diguem-ne ‘apassionades,’ m’han dut a escriure.<sup>683</sup>

[Renée Vivien fascinated me because of her nonconformist life, because of her affirmation of love of another woman [...]. But also because she experienced love with an exceptional intensity, a systematically tormented love [...] and I wanted to leave behind me the stage of my life characterized by tormented loves. Listen to this apparent contradiction. At the same time, I followed Renée Vivien’s steps with true passion. It is as if I had substituted obsessive love for a person by obsessing with a ghost. [...] In fact, both of them, while they were active, let’s say ‘passionate,’ led me to write.]

Passion and desire, in Marçal’s reading of Vivien, are inherently linked with suffering. Passion, for Marçal ‘és una paraula connectada amb els dos extrems: èxtasi i turments’<sup>684</sup> (‘is a word connected to two extremes: ecstasy and torments.’) In one of the untitled poems from *Desglaç*, Marçal metaphorizes desire as a painful need for identification, impossible to fulfill: ‘Dolor de ser tan diferent de tu. | Dolor d’una semblança sense termes... | Dolor de ser i de no ser tu: desig.’<sup>685</sup> (‘The pain of being so different from you. | The pain of a resemblance without limits... | The pain of being and not being you: desire.’) Such understanding of passion is expressed throughout Marçal’s poetry in the concept of ‘desig sense baranes’ (‘desire with no barriers’), which may point to the abolishment of boundaries that divide one individual from another.

Marçal compares the ‘tormented love,’ love as obsession, with the obsessive ‘love’ between

<sup>682</sup> Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 92.

<sup>683</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac*, p. 172.

<sup>684</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac*, p. 176.

<sup>685</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 434.



the reader and the writer. Sara T. experiences her relationship with Vivien as an obsession which, in turn, responds to the complex dynamics of otherness and identification. As with the boundaries between literature and life, in Marçal's vision of passion and desire the boundaries between individuals get blurred. At first, Sara T. understands desire, as well as the process of reading, as blending with the Other, across time, language, and even death. Sara T. cites Vivien's verses (in Marçal's translation) and confesses to having made them hers:

'Pal·lides, respirant-nos la carn perfumada,  
en l'evocació màgica de la nit  
direu: "Aquesta dona té l'ardor que em defuig...  
Si fos viva! Ella sí que m'hauria estimat!"'

Es curiós: en un primer moment havia fet meu aquest darrer vers. Havia pensat de Renée Vivien això: ella sí que m'hauria estimat. Després he vist, a mesura que m'he endinsat en la seva història, que aquest sentiment reposava, com tantes altres coses, en una fal·làcia.<sup>686</sup>

['Pallid and breathing your perfumed flesh | in the magical evocation of the night | you will say: "This lady has the ardor that flees from me... | If she was alive! She would truly have loved me!'" It is curious: at first I had made this last line my own. I had thought this very thing of Renée Vivien: that she would have loved me. Afterwards, after going into her story, I have seen that this feeling, like so many other things, was based on a fallacy.']<sup>687</sup>

The allusions to intimacy, love, and desire in the passage may be read as metaphors of translation and reading, both understood as entailing impossible complementations and identifications, as if 'above' or 'beyond' difference. However, in the last paragraph that she writes, Sara T. acknowledges the necessity of distance: the writer whose work she studies is not the same as Sara T. The only possible union, and the most fruitful one, between the author and the translator or the reader, indeed between two lovers, entails embracing difference:

A hores d'ara, sé que Renée i jo ens havíem de trobar així: per damunt d'aquest abisme que el temps i l'oblit han intentat d'establir entre nosaltres. L'equilibri només es fa possible a través d'aquesta mena de superació –momentània– de la mort que és un poema, un llibre, una pel·lícula...<sup>688</sup>

[Right now, I only know that Renée and I could only have met in the way in which we have: above and beyond this abyss that time and oblivion have tried to establish between

<sup>686</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, pp. 382–383.

<sup>687</sup> Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 338.

<sup>688</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, p. 383.

us. Equilibrium is only possible through this kind of – momentary – overcoming of death that is a poem, a book, a film...]<sup>689</sup>

Even though Sara T. describes a physical encounter with Vivien as a utopian illusion, she still evokes it as, well, utopian, as a horizon, indeed as a place no-where *yet* in existence. *La narradora* becomes, thus, the manifestation of Sara T.'s desires: even though Sara T. acknowledges the impossibility of an actual encounter with the object of her desire, the fantasy persists, and exists, providing the framework for Sara T.'s story. As soon as she makes the assertion above, *la narradora* interrupts Sara T. and writes, in block capitals, the following:

LA NARRADORA, QUE FINS AQUEST MOMENT HA REPRESENTAT EL PAPER D'UN ESTRANY CORIFEU, OFICIANT EN MIG D'UN COR HETEROGENI I SOVINT REBEL, DECIDEIX ARA, ESTRAFENT EL PAPER DE LA MORT I FENT GALA DE LA SEVA MATEIXA PROVERBIAL ARBITRARIETAT, ESTRONCAR EL CURS DE LA NARRACIÓ EN AQUEST PUNT.<sup>690</sup>

*[The narrator, who up until now has played the role of a strange coryphaeus, officiating amidst a heterogenous and often rebellious chorus, now decides to take on the role of death and, making show of her proverbial arbitrariness, break the course of the narration at this point.]*<sup>691</sup>

The narrative structure of the novel is at once brought to the fore and problematized, yet again; more specifically, it is interrupted to open a space for a mixture of poetry and prose, in which the voice of the narradora merges with the poetic voice of Vivien. The last section of the novel, titled 'Monòdia final,' arguably constitutes the most significant instance of blurring between the voice of Marçal's narrators and Vivien's poetic voice, which I discussed earlier in relation to Marçal's translation strategies. Marçal's vision of translating, which Caterina Riba compares to cannibalization of the source text,<sup>692</sup> relies on breaking or overcoming boundaries between texts, authors, and languages. Such boundary-breaking or blurring, however, risks abolishing foreignness and contradicting Marçal's intention of preserving the inner heterogeneity of the texts that she reads, translates, transcribes, and absorbs. If, as I argue in Chapter Three, Marçal metaphorizes the collaboration between the writer and the translator as a poetic dialogue and as an affective relationship, the poet also seems to ask on what terms such a relationship can exist.

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<sup>689</sup> Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 339.

<sup>690</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, p. 384.

<sup>691</sup> Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 339. (In the English translation, the block capitals have been substituted with italics.)

<sup>692</sup> Riba Sanmartí, 'Maria-Mercè Marçal, tradició/traduició/creació,' p. 479.

To answer, or at least rephrase, that question, we should start with the relationship of Sara T. with herself as a writer, a relationship that is presented as complex and turbulent from the start. The first sentence of *La passió* is pronounced in a dream, at night, by Sara T. who speaks to an inexistent audience, made up of fantastic, deformed creatures, deprived of eyes, limbs, or with snake hair. *La narradora* recounts the dream of Sara T., who, in turn, is in the process of giving an account of her first encounter with the works of Renée Vivien, creating an oblique, repeated sense of temporality. The monstrosity of the public congregated in the dream is attributed to the lack of symmetry of their bodies, which leads the narrator to throw into question their humanity – they are referred to as homunculi.<sup>693</sup> But the narration itself, seen through the squinting eye of the narrator, fractured and collage-like, turns out equally ‘deformed’ as the public that listens to Sara T. in her dream.

‘Fa cinc anys em van caure a les mans uns versos d’una fosca bellesa,’ diu Sara T. Ha començat puntualment la seva dirrestació davant d’una sala completament buida. Però, tal com el màgic Flautista s’enduia darrere seu corrués de rates i d’infants, les seves paraules han començat a suscitar, com eixit de sota les pedres, un seguici estrany i bigarrat de personatges que van prenent seient davant seu sense ordre ni concert. [...] davant d’ella s’estintolen damunt les seves croses i pròtesis respectives éssers esguerrats i escapçats de tota mena. Nans boteruts, capgrossos sinistres, criatures gegantines que ostenten enmig del front el seu únic ull on lluu la còlera del rom. [...] Eunucs i hemafrodites fent ostentació dels seus excessos o de les seves mancances sobrevingudes o originals. Diables amb peus de cabra i dlabllesses amb cabells de serps.<sup>694</sup>

[‘Five years ago I stumbled upon verses of dark beauty,’ says Sara T., punctually commencing her disquisition before a completely empty room. But just as the Pied Piper drew streams of kids and rats behind him, her words begin to bring to life a strange, motley retinue of characters, as if emerging from under the flagstones, who proceed to take a seat before her without rhyme or reason. [...] Propped up on crutches and prostheses are all manner of mutilated and deformed beings: squat dwarves, sinister big-heads, giant creatures with one eye in their foreheads glowing in rum-induced bile. [...] Eunuchs and hemaphrodites ostentatiously displaying either their excess or their original or supervening lack. He-devils with cloven feet and she-devils with serpents for hair.]<sup>695</sup>

*La narradora*, translated by McNerney and Buffery as ‘the teller,’ comments on her own act of creation as follows:

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<sup>693</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, p. 14.

<sup>694</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, p. 14.

<sup>695</sup> Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 7.

La narradora d'aquest relat —o, més ben dit, d'aquesta estranya miscel·lània de relats diversament teixits, que es desplegarà al llarg de les pàgines que segueixen— contempla, per un moment, aquest personatge seu que és Sara T. mentre s'enfronta al seu malson.<sup>696</sup>

[The teller of this tale – or rather, strange miscellany of narrations woven together diversely, which are about to unfold in the following pages – contemplates her creation, Sara T., for a moment as she confronts her nightmare.]<sup>697</sup>

To be able to tell the tale, Sara T. needs to confront the monsters she sees. She needs to confront the fear, her own internalized fear of the oblique, the deviant, the queer, or perhaps also the fear of the untamed, shameless desire that she saw in the story of Vivien. Similarly to Marçal's reflection on women's writing and monstrosity, discussed in Chapter Two, Gloria Anzaldúa – a *Chicana*, lesbian, multilingual writer and activist – described her discovery that women, especially those who give themselves to live and write according to their desires, are often described as monsters. For Anzaldúa, to accept the monster in oneself is to accept the body which is also the soul:

She – that's how I think of *la Vibora*, Snake Woman. Like the ancient Olmecs, I know Earth is a coiled Serpent. Forty years it's taken me to enter into the Serpent, to acknowledge that I have a body, that I am a body, and to assimilate the animal body, the animal soul.<sup>698</sup>

The image of a coiled serpent evokes obliqueness, a change of orientation, an abandonment of a straight, well-trodden path. Similarly, to be able to write, the narrator in *La passió* needs to look from a different angle. Sara T. looks in the mirror, but there is no one there. Then, an Angel appears and gives her a message that she tries to retain but does not fully understand:

Es lleva i es mira en el mirall, però de cop en el mirall no hi ha ningú. No diu res, com si qualsevol mot pogués desvetllar la revessa i polimorfa processó que s'ha esvanit i convocar els seus membres a mirar-la des de l'altra banda de la lluna. Torna al llit convençuda que encara somia. Llavors apareix l'Àngel i la desperta, ara sí, per fer-li una revelació fulgurant. Sara T. s'esforça per retenir cada so, cada síl·laba, cada paraula del missatge, que, de moment, no entén, com si fos fet en una llengua de la qual desconeix el codi.<sup>699</sup>

[She gets up and looks at herself in the mirror, but suddenly the mirror goes blank. She says nothing, as if a single word might reawaken the unruly, polymorphous procession

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<sup>696</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, p. 13.

<sup>697</sup> Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 7.

<sup>698</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera*, p. 26

<sup>699</sup> Marçal, *La passió*, p. 15.

that has just vanished, conjuring them up once more to ogle her from the other side of the glass. She returns on tiptoe to her bed, convinced she is still dreaming. That is when the Angel appears and wakens her, at last, with a dazzling revelation. Sara T. makes an effort to retain every sound, every syllable, every word of the message she does not yet understand, as if it were encoded in a language unknown to her.]<sup>700</sup>

After witnessing the monstrous procession, Sara T. searches for her own reflection, but there is none – she has momentarily disappeared, perhaps in preparation to become a vessel, a medium for Vivien's life story. Sara T. hears the voice of the angel, she does not understand the message, but is able to relate to it; like the Virgin Mary, she gives her *fiat* to whatever task the angel asks her to undertake. The angel, whose voice can be heard at night, suggests a connection with Hélène Cixous' essay *Vivre l'Orange*, Cixous' literary dialogue with Clarice Lispector and itself a reading of Lispector's novel *A Paixão Segundo G.H.* ('Passion According to G.H.') Cixous describes the moment of a first reading encounter with Lispector in passionate words:

A woman's voice came to me from far away, like a voice from a birthtown, it brought me insights that I once had, intimate insights, intimate insights, naive and knowing, ancient and fresh like the yellow and violet color of freesias rediscovered, [...] this voice was not searching for me, it was writing to no one, [...] in a foreign tongue. I do not speak it, but my heart understands it, and its silent words in all the veins of my life have translated themselves into mad blood, into joy-blood. A writing came with an angel's footsteps, – when I was so far from myself, alone at the extremity of my finite being.<sup>701</sup>

For Emma Wilson, the reading encounter between Cixous and Lispector in the text is metaphorized in sensual, corporeal terms, almost as a sexual encounter:

Her imagery of flesh and blood immediately draws attention to the carnal nature of this encounter. In the eroticizing of a reading encounter between female writer and female reader, Cixous offers the spectre of a lesbian desiring relation.<sup>702</sup>

The same could be said about Sara T.'s appropriation of Vivien's verse 'she would have loved me.' Cixous' erotic vision of intuitive communication, almost without knowing each other's language, without translation, rather than rendering such communication or identification possible, points to its impossibility. The questioning of the need for precise translation and the resulting permeability between translating and writing, when taken to an extreme, may substitute

<sup>700</sup> Marçal, *The Passion*, p. 8.

<sup>701</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'To Live the Orange,' in *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. by Susan Sellers (Taylor and Francis, 2003), e-book, p. 85.

<sup>702</sup> Emma Wilson, *Sexuality and the Reading Encounter: Identity and Desire in Proust, Duras, Tournier, and Cixous* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. 111.

the utopian vision of a sacred authority of the original text with another utopia: that of a perfect identification with the Other, which Wilson refers to as ‘troubled pleasures of pained identification.’<sup>703</sup> For Wilson, ‘Cixous denies the identity and agency of the Other.’<sup>704</sup> In Marçal’s novel, however, translation does occur, although, as noted in the previous chapter, translation, just like literary mimesis, reveals itself as always already counterfeit.

While ‘passion’ in *La passió* suggests an obsessive, transgressive, cannibalistic infatuation with the other, it may also be read in the light of the gospels.<sup>705</sup> In her reading of Akhmatova, Marçal focused on passion as suffering, perhaps in keeping with the religiously charged sense of ‘passion’ signifying ‘the suffering of Christ on the cross.’<sup>706</sup> Working in the shadow of Christian passion, Marçal centers her reading of Akhmatova on the suffering of women in oppressive, political environments. The experience of political oppression is rendered in Anna Akhmatova’s *Requiem*, in which the Russian author describes the imprisonment of her son, a historian, translator, and fervent supporter of the national movements of Tatars, Kazakhs and Mongolians, who was convicted and sent to labor camps by the Stalinist regime. Akhmatova’s *Requiem* abounds in Biblical references. The poetic voice alludes to Christ and the Passion, with images that include Saint Peter’s denial, the crucifixion, and resurrection.<sup>707</sup> In the poem ‘Crucifixion,’ Akhmatova depicts the personal *via crucis* of a mother whose son is sentenced to death. The poem begins with an allusion the Bible ‘Don’t weep for me, mother,’ which may refer to Luke 23:28 – ‘Daughters of Jerusalem do not weep for me, weep for yourselves and for your children,’<sup>708</sup> and which Marçal later incorporates in a poem from *Raó del cos*, to represent the suffering of a woman dying from cancer.<sup>709</sup> Marçal writes: ‘No ploris per mi, mare a punta de l’alba. No ploris per mi, mare, plora amb mi.’ (‘Don’t weep for me, mother

<sup>703</sup> Wilson, *Sexuality and the Reading Encounter*, p. 197.

<sup>704</sup> 124

<sup>705</sup> I thank Professor Brad Epps for bringing to my attention many other non-heteronormative artists who ‘secularized’ ‘sacred’ texts: for instance, Pasolini’s *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964) ‘translates’ the Passion of Christ according to the Gospel of Matthew into a neorealist drama film. In *Saint Genet, Actor and Martyr* (1952), Jean-Paul Sartre dialogues with the convention of a hagiographic account to describe the life of Genet, touching upon such topics as sexual dissidence and gender bending. David Halperin continues the queering of ‘sacred texts’ with his *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, in which he refracts the hagiographic, idealizing convention to ask the question of the popularity of Foucault’s work among queer critics, in spite of a very scarce presence of the topic of homosexuality in his texts.

<sup>706</sup> See: ‘passion’ in *Etymological Dictionary Online* <<https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=passion>> [accessed 16 September 2020]

<sup>707</sup> Riba, ‘Maria-Mercè Marçal, tradició/traduició/creació’, p. 477.

<sup>708</sup> Luke 23:28, *ESV*: <<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+23%3A28+&version=ESV>> [accessed 20 October 2019]

<sup>709</sup> Riba Sanmartí, ‘Maria-Mercè Marçal, tradició/traduició/creació’, p. 477.

at the break of dawn. Don't weep for me, mother, weep with me.')<sup>710</sup> In Akhmatova as in Marçal, the mother is (also) the mother of Christ, or, at times, Christ himself.

Similarly, *La passió* can be read as a quasi-hagiographic account of a secular woman, Renée Vivien, even though *la narradora*, as well as the other narrative personae in the novel, offer confessedly fragmentary perspectives on the plot and do not constitute 'reliable narrators.' Sara T.'s passion, implicating a relationship between two subjects, reveals itself to be the relationship of the reader with an idealized persona of a dead author or, perhaps, a relationship of the reader with herself. There is something unrealistic in the way in which the ghostly, literary 'passion' between Vivien and Sara T. is represented in *La passió*. Indeed, we may say that Sara T.'s passion for Vivien *transcends* Vivien, if only to reaffirm the 'I' of Sara T. Over time, Sara T. discovers, however, that no other, ghostly 'I' will ever replicate her 'I' by way of a like-for-like 'translation.' Sara T., as mentioned in the previous chapter, admits to the impossibility of creating a 'coherent', 'straightened', 'organized' picture of Vivien. No matter how hard she tries, she keeps seeing her own reflection. Desire, thus, can never conclude in a merging of two into one. Indeed, as the poet herself reflects, (via Susan Brogger)  $1+1=1$  is an impossible equation, unless 'si un dels uns (la dona) era un zero,'<sup>711</sup> ('one of the ones (the woman) was a zero.') Marçal summarizes this kind of narcissistic, self-affirming desire in an essay dedicated to Rosa Leveroni; she comments on Leveroni's vision of an unfulfilled, inherently painful desire, aimed at reaffirming the poet's ego. But such a reading of passion may also be applied to Marçal's own writing:

la passió sempre va més enllà del individu concret que n'és el destinatari, té un sentit en ella mateixa perquè és ella que reforça el jo de la poeta, fent-la viure i sentir-se viure, i, de retruc, referma també la seva solitud.<sup>712</sup>

[passion always goes beyond the concrete individual to whom it is addressed, it has meaning in its own because it reinforces the poet's 'I,' making her live and feel alive and, coincidentally, it also affirms her solitude.]

To reaffirm one's subjectivity, to reinforce the poet's 'I,' these understandings of desire seem to entail abolishing the 'I' of the lover in order to communicate the poet's precarious individuality. This could lead us to the other interpretation of Sara T.'s lack of reflection in the mirror: it is not

<sup>710</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 502.

<sup>711</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac*, p. 173.

<sup>712</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac*, p. 59.

the reader who devours the writer's identity, but the reader, whose reflection in the mirror – her identity – was absent in the first place, “loses” herself in a text and in another person's language, thus becoming de-personalized and “devoured” even as she devours the other writer's text. There is a trace in one of Marçal's essays on writing and passion of linking destructive passions with the experience of exclusion or erasure from the symbolic, which Marçal relates to patriarchy:

l'amor passió tal com l'han viscuda algunes dones seria al mateix temps símptoma d'un desordre simbòlic femení i de l'expressió d'una subjectivitat que busca dotar-se d'un lloc en el món en primera persona.<sup>713</sup>

[love-passion, as experienced by some women, is at the same time symptomatic of a feminine symbolic disorder of the expression, of subjectivity, which seeks to find space in the world to express itself in the first person.]

Passion as annihilation, for Marçal, is here related to a ‘symbolic disorder,’ which, in the context of Marçal's reflection of women's genealogies, could perhaps be compared to the ‘orphanage’ of women within literature and culture. Marçal refers to ‘some women’ who experience passion as a ‘symptom,’ as a result of living in an unequal or disordered society. However, the potentially stigmatizing language of ‘some women's’ ‘symptoms’ and ‘disorders’ is mitigated by the gesture of sharing fragments of Marçal's own experience of a destructive passion in the form of poetry, especially in the collection *Terra de mai* (1982). The poems in *Terra de mai* tell the story of Marçal's love story with a woman named Mai, who also appears in other books of poems – in *La germana*, *l'estrangera* and in *Desglaç* and in Marçal's short story ‘El retorn’ (‘Return’). In her correspondence, Marçal described the relationship with Mai (her first same-sex relationship), as a turning point in her life and writing. She wrote: ‘No m'havia imaginat mai que el meu cos pogués desitjar una dona d'aquesta manera,’<sup>714</sup> (‘I had never imagined that my body could desire a woman in such a way’) and ‘Tinc la impressió [...] que la meva relació amb la Mai és una fita important en la meva redescoberta del meu cos i del meu desig... Sé que hi ha un abans i un després,’<sup>715</sup> (‘I am under the impression [...] that my relationship with Mai is a milestone in my rediscovery of my body and desire... I know that there is a “before” and “after.”’) In the book, the poet draws on medieval *sextines* to illustrate the obsessive repetition, the insistent recurrence of the illusion of merging:

<sup>713</sup> Marçal, *Sota el signe del drac*, p. 179.

<sup>714</sup> Julià, p. 241.

<sup>715</sup> Julià, p. 242.



M'endinso pel paisatge del teu cos  
 i em trobo quan l'amor et fa de plata.  
 I, al punt on Mai comença a ser el teu nom,  
 se'm menja viva el teu mirall voraç,  
 i jo et menjo, i em menjo el teu desig  
 i el meu, que em fiblen amb dents de tempesta.  
 No vull tornar salva de la tempesta  
 que trenca límits pel sud del teu cos,  
 on horitzons extrems criden desig  
 i estimben astres pel séc de la plata.  
 Em sé malalta d'espera voraç  
 emboscada en l'oratge del teu nom.<sup>716</sup>

[I sink into the landscape of your body | and I find myself when love covers you in silver |  
 And, when your name becomes Mai [Never], | your voracious mirror eats me up, | and I  
 eat you up, and I eat your desire | and mine, and the teeth of the storm sting me. | I do not  
 want to return safely from the storm | which breaks the limits at your body's south |  
 where extreme horizons scream desire | and stars fling down the creases of silver. | I  
 know myself sick from the greedy wait | ambushed by your name's breeze.]

It is telling that, in the course of delving into passion, Marçal refracts the convention of the *sextines*, a poetic composition attributed to Arnaut Daniel,<sup>717</sup> a twelfth-century *trobador* or bard who wrote in Provençal. The *sextines* were formed of six stanzas, with six dodecasyllabic verses in each, and one *tornada* —a final, shorter stanza of three verses.<sup>718</sup> The last words of each verse from the first stanza are then repeated throughout the remaining stanzas, each time in a different, pre-established order: 1 2 3 4 5 6, 6 1 5 2 4 3, 3 6 4 1 2 5, 5 3 2 6 1 4, 4 5 1 3 6 2, 2 4 6 5 3 1. In the *tornada*, all the last words are repeated, two in each verse.<sup>719</sup> The poetry of the Provençal bards was inspired by the ideals of courtly love: the tormented love of an idealized, inaccessible, almost unreal woman. In modern Catalan one of the most prominent propagators of the genre was Joan Brossa, whose work was an important influence for Marçal.<sup>720</sup> According to Julià, Marçal found the 'obsessive rhythm of the sextines' adequate to express the way in which she was experiencing her relationship with Mai.

<sup>716</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 254.

<sup>717</sup> 'Arnaut Daniel,' in *La gran enciclopèdia catalana* <<https://www.enciclopedia.cat/ec-gec-0005268.xml>> [accessed 16 September 2020]

<sup>718</sup> 'sextina,' in *La gran enciclopèdia catalana* <<https://www.enciclopedia.cat/ec-gec-0142310.xml>> [accessed 16 September 2020]

<sup>719</sup> Ibid.

<sup>720</sup> Julià, p. 247.

In her *sextines*, Marçal quotes and refracts not only the original poetic composition, but also the idealized, courtly love object. Even though in *Terra de mai* there are no personal pronouns that would determine the sex of the lovers (as Marçal explains in her letters to Jean-Paul Goujon, she wanted to create a more inclusive account of a romantic utopia or ‘paradise lost’ to which her readers could relate regardless of their gender and sexuality),<sup>721</sup> from Marçal’s numerous comments we know that the relationship she describes is between two women. The reiterative appearance of the word *Mai*, a woman’s name, which also translates as ‘never,’ also suggests that the object of the poem is a woman, and so do the metaphors and descriptions of sexual encounters, such as ‘el teu sexe i el meu són dues boques,’<sup>722</sup> (‘my sex and yours are two mouths.’)

Such extreme passion, which results in a mutual devouring, in which desire itself is devoured, becomes an obsessive and a destructive force. The lyrical ‘I’ does not want to ‘return safely from the storm;’ desire, as the ‘breaking of limits’ and the aspiration to ‘extreme horizons’ thus becomes linked to death. The tropes of courtly, idealized love are thus ‘translated’ into passionate, erotic descriptions of a lesbian relationship. The choice of words that are repeated is important: ‘voracious’ and ‘storm’ connote extreme experiences, danger, perhaps annihilation. At the same time ‘body’ and ‘desire’ suggest pleasure, ‘silver’ may relate to the moon, to reflection, to mirroring, while ‘name’ evokes the lover’s name, Mai.

In *Terra de mai*, the mirror becomes an exceptionally prominent symbol. Later in her life, the poet will qualify not only her relationship with Mai, but also the figure of mirror, as an impossible illusion. In a much later interview, the poet writes:

De fet el mirall és una imatge, una simbologia, que en literatura s'utilitza moltíssim i penso que va a la recerca d'una unitat. Potser aquesta unitat, a vegades, és fictícia. Crec que és una recerca de la identitat, però d'una unitat completa. Ens hi reconeixem sencers, en el mirall. Aquest construeix i reflecteix la imatge d'una certa aparença de coherència.<sup>723</sup>

[In fact, the mirror is an image, a symbology often used in literature, which I think is related to the search for a unity. This unity, perhaps, may be fictional. I think that it is a search for an identity, one that is completely cohesive. In a mirror, we recognize ourselves in our totality. The mirror construes and reflects the image of an apparent coherence.]

<sup>721</sup> Marçal, *El senyal de la pèrdua*, p. 100.

<sup>722</sup> Marçal, *Llengua abolida*, p. 246.

<sup>723</sup> Marçal, *El senyal de la pèrdua*, p. 189.

The words ‘image’ and ‘symbolology’ are used interchangeably by Marçal, as if suggesting a certain conceptual function of metaphors as interpreting devices. Similarly, in Fiedorczuk’s narrative, the mirror metaphor often appears in relation to the protagonists’ blurred, questioned and destabilized self-image. Fiedorczuk’s mirrors, most often old, clouded and grey, make it hard for the protagonists to see a “clean” reflection. Rather than representing a pure image, the mirrors persistently frustrate or disrupt the characters’ desired coherence. In the short story ‘Pieśń nad pieśniami’ (‘Song Of Songs’), from *Bliskie kraje*, a student from a small town, who lives in Warsaw, looks at herself in a clouded mirror and feels uninteresting and grim. Another character, Helena, a cleaning lady in *Nieważkość* (‘Zero-Gravity’)<sup>724</sup> looks at herself every morning in a stained mirror and tries to remember to buy a new mirror, but never has the time, so busy is she working and taking care of her children, husband and elderly mother. Helena travels to Warsaw to acquire a stroller for the baby, and wanders around the streets of the capital, watching her reflection in the shop windows, only to see in them the image of a woman dressed in worn-out clothes, her shoulders slumped, her haircut clashing with popular trends. Tellingly, Helena’s surname is *Przybysz*, which in Polish means ‘stranger’; she is, again, an outsider whose image does not fit easily into Warsaw-based notions of taste. In *Pod słońcem*, a woman looks at herself in the mirror and sees a clouded image of a body she does not appreciate, but, after engaging in an affair with one of her tenants, she starts to base her own image on the relationship with the boy. When he leaves, her life shatters into pieces. Both for Fiedorczuk and Marçal use the mirror as an image that problematizes the relationships of the ‘I’ with herself and the Other, pointing to the importance of delimiting the subject’s identity, of setting clear, yet permeable boundaries of the self that would allow for a flexible, safe connection with the Other.

A good representation of the importance of such boundaries is Marçal’s short story ‘Jocs de màscares’ (‘Games of masks’), a lesbian love story between a teacher and a student, which offers a somewhat sinister rendering of a turbulent passion.<sup>725</sup> The relationship between the two characters suggests violence, perhaps due to their unequal positions of power. The story, set in the Carnival (*carneïstoltes* in Catalan) may be read as allusive to a short story by Víctor Català titled ‘Carneïstoltes’ — a story of love between a marquise and her maid in which the affection between the two women is also affected by the asymmetrical distribution of power. Marçal who,

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<sup>724</sup> Fiedorczuk, *Nieważkość*.

<sup>725</sup> Short story published in: *Dones soles. 14 contes* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1995) p. 73-92.

in ‘Sextina mirall,’ praises the love between women as distant from the patriarchal symbolic order, ‘lluny dels topants que definex l’espasa,’<sup>726</sup> (‘far from the clashes which the sword defines’) has re-signified violence in the story as related not necessarily to gender, but to power in its many dimensions. Marçal’s ‘Jocs de màscares’ also alludes to Carme Riera’s short story ‘Te deix, amor, la mar com a penyora’ (‘I Leave You, My Love, The Sea as My Pledge,’ first published in 1975, the year of Franco’s death) and ‘Jo pos com a testimoni les gavines’ (‘I Put Forth The Seagulls As Testimony,’ 1977), in which the Mallorcan author tells the story of love between two women, a student and a teacher. In Riera’s story, the love story could not find its happy ending due to the will of the student’s oppressive, conservative father, as well as the authority of the Francoist schooling system. But the relationship between the two, very much romanticized in the story, was additionally complicated by the relations of authority between the protagonists themselves, which Marçal’s story seems to be pointing to. In ‘Jocs de mascare’, Júlia and Neus initiate their relationship in winter, during the Carnival in Barcelona. The story begins with the description of the city covered in snow. The pure whiteness of snow, reiterated in the name of the student protagonist – Neus, which also means snow and alludes to whiteness, to an imagined purity, acts as a disguising device, as one of the many masks worn during Carnival. Soon we discover that Neus is unable to look into the mirror, nor can she dance with her lover — she considers two women dancing to be a ridiculous image. She rejects the image of herself as a lesbian, she cannot stand her own reflection, and this auto-rejection makes her vulnerable. The presence of blood in the sex scene may allude to virginity – the breaking of boundaries of the other – but also to passion, to a carnal encounter, as if, in an unequal relationship like this, the two were inevitably linked.

Many years later, Júlia, Neus’ former lover, says she cannot remember the body of Neus, only the words she spoke. Júlia has abstracted Neus into a discursive figure, white and “pure” as snow, detached from the body and from its earthly stickiness. But perhaps the “purity” of Neus may also have a positive, empowering dimension in the story – apart from her conflictive and denied identification as lesbian, Neus consciously rejected a relationship with a superior who she felt did not ‘take her seriously’ and on whose authority she depended. The rejection of this passion, in this case, may also point to a positive, self-affirmative gesture of boundary-setting.

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<sup>726</sup> Maria-Mercè Marçal, *Poesia completa 1973-1998* (Barcelona: *labutxaca*, 2017) p. 244-245.

In her understanding of passion, Marçal not only thematizes the crucial importance – and the ambivalence – of boundaries, but also demonstrates her understanding of the reading encounter in her writing practice. In her relationship with her readers, Marçal does not hide behind an abstract authorial figure. Instead, she invites the readers both to savor the exquisite flesh of her literature and to find out about some personal circumstances and relationship that inspired her literary explorations. Furthermore, she also invites us readers to witness the evolution of some of her ideas, especially those related to love and writing. In showing hospitality and vulnerability to her readers, Marçal seems to promote a certain permeability of the boundaries that, while separating the reader and the writer, still allow for connection.

In this chapter, I have examined the figure of the border or boundary in select fragments of Marçal's and Fiedorczuk's texts. As I have observed, linguistic borders in both writers' work appear in the context of wider, social, linguistic, erotic, and ecological issues. For Fiedorczuk, the hegemonic position of certain languages, especially English, should be considered in conjunction with the consequences such hegemonies may have for the global imagination. To take concepts from a language, for example from the field of ecology, spirituality, or mindfulness, often entails uprooting these concepts and disorienting, de- and re-contextualizing them, all of which results in a 'bad translation' effect. An alternative strategy of incorporating foreign languages into 'international' environments such as the corporate company described in Fiedorczuk's *Nieważkość*, appears to involve non-translation. Rather than bringing the target recipient 'closer to the source language,' or the other way round, the consumers of international content, such as the names of yoga postures or the descriptions of 'organic' luxury products "work" with multilingual, rather than culturally translated content, so that the choice of discovering the meaning of the 'foreign' terms and concepts is left to the reader. On the other hand, by incorporating multilingual references, Fiedorczuk mixes languages, thus pointing to the arbitrary nature of the linguistic norm, but also to the hierarchies between the languages that 'absorb' foreign references, in this case a locally hegemonic Polish, but also, as noted, a globally hegemonic English.

The ethics of embracing foreignness, for Fiedorczuk, also applies to the inner, symbolic 'foreigners' or insider-outsiders in her stories, those beings who act as intermediaries between, on the one hand, the normative codes of expression, such as 'high art,' binary gender expression,

and ‘cultured’ uses of language, and, on the other hand, non-normative, ‘disoriented’ or ‘queer’ codes of expression. In Fiedorczuk’s stories, the ‘outsider’ characters play an important role, pointing to the internal diversity of the Polish language, which also involves rethinking established hierarchies. In Fiedorczuk’s stories, the peripheral role of swearwords, for example, is linked to the exclusion of Polish speakers of low social status, such as the homeless, the immigrants, or the disabled. Fiedorczuk also signals questions of intelligibility and unintelligibility as factors of exclusion and precariousness. The uncomfortable, limiting boundaries of communicability, the need to push, over and again, against those boundaries, for Marçal, may result in the destabilization of one’s own poetic or narrative voice, and the blurring of one’s own boundaries. For Marçal, one of the most common contexts in which the metaphors of boundaries appear as passion, suffering and desire. Marçal uses the figure of passion to refer to both personal relationships, within the diegesis, and the extra-personal relationships between reader and writer, author and translator. Love as passion, for Marçal, involves a negotiation of boundaries between two lovers, between the reader and the writer, the writer and the translator, between languages. Without embracing difference, communication becomes impossible and the desire to absorb the foreign prevails.

Both Fiedorczuk and Marçal attempt to redefine desire, image, identification and writing, which leads them to rejecting, or at least complicating, the vision of passion as the abolition of the boundaries between the self and the other. Both of them also point to the increased risk of ‘losing oneself’ due to an oblique, disoriented or disorienting manner of inhabiting the space of the symbolic oikos. In their texts, queer theory merges with ecopoetics, creating a vision of writing that reimagines language and home, striving to create a more inclusive symbolic space in which boundaries do not serve to divide and categorize, but allow for a certain degree of permeability, exchange, and mutual complementation between languages, bodies, and forms of life.

## Concluding Remarks

When I started writing this dissertation, I contemplated the idea of calling my concluding remarks otherwise, so as to suggest ‘queering’ or querying the structure of a dissertation. Ironically, I discovered that the structured, standard, perhaps even ‘correct’ form was actually helpful in pushing against established images of correctness. As is the case with Marçal’s *sextines*, or Fiedorczuk’s *Psalms*, I believe that self-imposed structures, limits and patterns of regularity may, at times, serve as liberating devices. The spoken and, no less importantly, unspoken rules that regulate linguistic communication, writing and translation undergo refractions and transformations with every utterance or ‘citation’ of the norm. Even verbatim ‘quotations’ or ‘transcriptions,’ as Jorge Luis Borges famously conveys in ‘Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*,’ are never exact replications of an ‘original,’ as the ‘same’ words, reiterated, are altered, made different, by the change in times and places, subjects and circumstances. What is more, meaning cannot be limited to words alone, to a circumscribed and self-evident understanding of the linguistic, but should also attend to gesture, body and visual communication, and, of course, to shifting historical, cultural and multilingual contexts. Accordingly, I read multilingual texts, language mixing, and translation as parts of a wider web of mutually entangled codes, not only linguistic or symbolic, but which also include the images we see, the sounds we hear, the relationships and connections we maintain, the water we drink, the air we breathe, the illnesses we undergo, the physical and psychological traces that political or social exclusion can leave on us and/or others. If meaning is material, as we may infer from Fiedorczuk’s texts, then not only can non-humans *also* create and contribute to it, but they effectively contest any ‘purely rational’—in the sense of ‘exclusively human’—understanding of *logos*.

In this dissertation, I have enquired into the reading communities that gather around Fiedorczuk’s and Marçal’s texts, and the extent to which these communities are implicated, or not, in the vision of literature as a practice of hospitality, especially as concerns the feminist and queer images of the nation. In Chapter One, I have examined the metaphoric transformations of the nation and its family-related metaphorizations in the histories of Polish and Catalan literature, focusing on those texts and writers that are most relevant to Marçal and Fiedorczuk. Both in Poland and in Catalonia (although not necessarily in other Catalan-speaking regions), language has historically been associated with an image of the nation as an oppressed or embattled

community that needs to build its autonomy by differentiating itself from the languages and cultures of the oppressors. The development of Catalan has been, and continues to be, conditioned by the hierarchical multilingualism of Spain; similarly, Polish has been conditioned by centuries of invasion and occupation, even erasure from the map for over a century. Although Poland is now an independent nation-state, the versions of Polish patriotism that prevail, not only in politics but also in language studies, are still based on a storehouse of images of cultural oppression and the phantasm of Western and Eastern (i.e. Russian) predation and/or otherness – images, and discourses, that, as I have argued, have a long history in Polish literature. In both cases, for all their differences, the images and discourses of the oppressed nation are often fashioned according to heteronormative, patriarchal models of family, which reduce, restrict and impoverish the symbolic repertoires of community, national or otherwise, in Polish as well as in Catalan.

Chapter Two is dedicated to alternative, feminist visions of patriotism proposed by both authors. In ‘Elogi del drac,’ Marçal approaches language and literature from a feminist perspective, questioning the traditional exclusion of women from the realms of language, reason and culture. In reclaiming the image of the suffering dragon, Marçal interrogates longstanding binary divisions between, on the one hand, the material, the irrational, and the ‘feminine’ and, on the other, the intellectual, the rational, and the ‘masculine.’ For her part, in the essay ‘Strangers in the Country of the Poet,’ Fiedorczuk queries the martyrs, heroes, and national bards which have been fundamental to Polish literary tradition. For Fiedorczuk, these and other images create a masculinized version of the Polish community, which Janion —whom Fiedorczuk often admiringly quotes— refers to as ‘homosocial.’ These Romantic and post-Romantic images, based, as we have seen, on the fetishization of violence against women, assume that meaning is only symbolic and violence, only metaphorical, ‘pure’ and ‘untethered.’ However, in her novel *Nieważkość* and her short stories from *Bliskie kraje*, Fiedorczuk draws attention to violence, especially sexual violence, in all its materiality. The survivors in Fiedorczuk’s texts are mostly women and children, often homeless, disabled, or economically marginalized, people whose stories and experiences point to a political and economic background of vulnerability, errancy and precariousness. In response to mainstream narratives of the nation, Fiedorczuk and Marçal offer multiple alternative visions. For Marçal, the ideals of heritage, inheritance and legacy, until recently based on an idealized metaphorical model of a heterosexual ‘line of descent,’ must be



opened up to include communities of women and realistic images of motherhood, sisterhood, and women's solidarity. For her part, Fiedorczuk questions the 'patriotic' focus on the 'fatherland;' instead, she proposes we pay more attention to the material components of our shared home, such as animals, plants and the environment more generally, all of which are interconnected with human territories and beings.

In Chapter Three, I have gathered together Marçal's and Fiedorczuk's ideas on translation. Translation, in some respects, may be seen as being at odds with literary multilingualism, in that it involves a transfer of meaning from one language to another. Such transfer, however, is not unidirectional and always leaves a trace. What is more, meaning, in a multilingual, material, multifaceted sense, is only 'transported' in fragments, which then interact with other fragments, surroundings and circumstances of the target language. That is why, in this chapter, I rely on Lefevere's concept of the *refraction* of meaning. Refraction suggests a fracture, a fissure, but it also evokes a prism, indeed a rainbow, a multicolored, multifaceted view of the world. Both Marçal and Fiedorczuk acknowledge the complexity of meanings involved in the process of translation. Unable to 'transport' the totality of a text's 'message,' Fiedorczuk tends to focus on those aspects of form and content that have to do with ecocriticism, with the relationship between humans and non-humans or 'more-than-humans.' Marçal, on the other hand, opts for more 'appropriative' if approximate translations, acknowledging not only the impossibility of a perfect complementation between languages, but also claiming that to 'uproot' a text from its context, often politicized, entails fleshing out other shades of the text's array of meanings which, in the original context, might have remained concealed. I read Marçal's translation strategies via Venuti's notion of the translator's invisibility, taking into account, however, the position of Catalan among other literary polysystems, as understood by Even-Zohar and Toury. Marçal's translations both supplement and query the idea of literary polysystems; they can also be read from the perspective of feminist understanding of minority literature, as described by Wittig or from the perspective of 'minor literatures' as described by Deleuze and Guattari. In Chapter Four, I explore translation as a metaphor, focusing on the importance of intersemiotic transfers and interdisciplinary dialogues in Fiedorczuk's and Marçal's texts. Both authors see translation as a prolific metaphor for talking about any number of other things from gender, sexuality, and race to author-reader relationships, music, or anthropocentrism. Upon

closer examination, we see that the authors' views on translation may tell us just as much about their own writing as they do about translating other texts.

In Chapter Five, I continue to explore the idea of transfer, here in the form of language borders and their crossings. I touch upon the notion of outsiders, i.e. those characters in Fiedorczuk's and Marçal's texts that remain somehow 'foreign' or cast outside the borders that delimit normative understandings of language. In *Nieważkość*, Fiedorczuk uses multilingual or 'foreign' loans to reflect on the permeability of language borders. In *Bliskie kraje*, *Biała Ofelia* and *Pod słońcem*, she follows the lives of some of the internal 'foreigners' or 'outsiders' who speak 'other' versions of Polish and who inhabit spaces and times in unusual, queer or 'disorienting' ways. Among the different consequences of such 'disorienting' or 'queer' forms of inhabiting language and space, I especially point to the precariousness of lives that cannot be communicated, stories that cannot be told or comprehended, and deaths that cannot be grieved. In the second half of the chapter, I return to Marçal's 'appropriative' vision of translation and intertextuality in order to consider it in the context of Marçal's understanding of writing as passion, both as suffering and as desire. Throughout her work, Marçal struggled with the stereotype that the writing 'I' needs to see itself mirrored – in other writers read or translated, in relationships, in language, in different visions of the nation offered by the literary canon. But such desire for identification is utopian, as the poet concluded later in her career, in the preface to her collected poems, *Llengua abolida*. Marçal refers to appropriative attitudes towards other writers, but also in relationships, as narcissistic; she claims that to expect the other to complement one's literary or psychological 'I' is a sign of an unstable identity or 'symbolic orphanage,' often related to experiences of silencing and oppression. Marçal's poetry and prose are in many ways the effect of a life-long quest for grasping differences, nuances and potential affiliations without annulling the complexities that surround trans- and multilingual literary encounters with other writers, lovers, friends, non-humans and mythical creatures.

As I mention in the introduction, the apparent contradictions in the texts between linguistic, symbolic, and material understandings of language and multilingualism share common tropes, assumptions, and dilemmas that oscillate between communication and community-making. Following Bullock and Toribio, I contend that switching codes, shifting registers, making multilingual insertions, transferring from 'other' languages and mixing genres 'do not represent a breakdown in communication, but reflect the skillful manipulation of two language

systems” [or more, we shall add] “for various communicative functions.”<sup>727</sup> In dialogue, the efficiency of communication depends on the linguistic and symbolic repertoires (the communality or lack thereof) between the speakers, as conversation it often situational; additionally, dialogue may also allow for additional explanation when communication breaks down. As we learn from Marçal and Fiedorczuk, writing indeed often resembles a conversation—between writers, languages, traditions, etc.—that often involves moments of silence that implicitly acknowledge the insufficiency, if not the impossibility, of speech. Ultimately, it is the text that should “speak” for itself, but not only *for* itself, but also *for* various kinds of readers and, of course, non-readers, all those ‘other’ beings, human and non-human, that comprise a potential community around any given language. While I have grappled mainly with texts written predominantly in ‘one’ language, in the future I plan to investigate texts in which ‘other’ languages play a more prominent role. Other horizons of research include digital communications and the impact of new information technologies on the understanding of language and its implication in questions of purity and mixing, community and communication, and so on. If, as I have argued via Lakoff and Johnson, we live by certain metaphors, then the perceptions and conceptualizations of language and community are currently undergoing further alterations, intricately linked to rapidly shifting media, virtual interfaces, text and voice processors, artificial intelligence and algorithms, all of which ‘multiply’ multilingual communication as heretofore understood.

Finally, to continue inquiring into the ways in which ‘we,’ the various kinds of humans, communicate and cohabit, or not, in, across and outside national languages, seems especially important at the present moment. In the past five years, the Law and Justice party has attained power in Poland after having based its initial campaign on hateful and threatening comments about refugees and immigrants. The recent elections in Poland have become infamous across the world for political pronouncements that LGBTQI Poles are ‘an ideology, not [a] people’ and that said ‘ideology’ is ‘worse than Communism.’<sup>728</sup> In the meantime, Britain, where I have conducted most of my doctoral work, has voted to leave the European Union, amidst xenophobic slogans, with David Cameron’s incendiary reference to ‘swarms of people coming across the Mediterranean’ and *Daily Mail* headlines that showcase images of ‘tidal waves of migrants’ that

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<sup>727</sup> B. E. Bullock, A. J. Toribio, p. 4

<sup>728</sup> See <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53039864>> [Accessed 26 September 2020]

could become ‘the biggest threat to Europe since the war.’<sup>729</sup> In Spain, or the Spanish State, hundreds of Catalans were beaten and injured by state police in the 2017 referendum on independence, and political prisoners spent over three years in prison, after initially being sentenced to up to thirteen years of prison, before the recent sentence that finally set them free. In the United States, whose global presence continues to loom large, President Donald Trump continued (before finally losing the last election) to try to build an anti-immigrant wall, to encourage the police to use violence,<sup>730</sup> and to deny the planetary devastations caused by climate change while the COVID19 pandemic, likely the result of eating and illegally breeding wild animals, continued to ravage the world. In a recent publication regarding the pandemic and the growing sense of danger and unpredictability, Fiedorczuk came to a conclusion that I would like to make mine as one of the concluding sentences of this thesis: ‘No one and nothing guarantees a hundred percent security for us [...]. Our living, intelligent and ever-changing bodies belong to the world, in which all processes and phenomena are interconnected.’<sup>731</sup> Fiedorczuk’s statement comes from an essay entitled ‘Lessons on Coexistence,’ which suggests that, just as communicating is an ongoing, multifarious, multilingual process, so too is coexisting, which involves questioning and querying, mixing and transforming, as well as understanding the links between the languages that different kinds of beings use to narrate themselves and others.

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<sup>729</sup> See: <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/10/migration-debate-metaphors-swarms-floods-marauders-migrants>> [Accessed 25 September 2016]

<sup>730</sup> <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2017/07/28/trumps-speech-encouraging-police-to-be-rough-annotated/>> [Accessed 25 September 2016]

<sup>731</sup> ‘nikt i nic nie gwarantuje nam stuprocentowego bezpieczeństwa [...]. Nasze żywe, inteligentne i bez ustanku podlegające zmianom ciała przynależą do świata, w którym wszystkie procesy i zjawiska są ze sobą powiązane.’ Julia Fiedorczuk, *Lekcje współistnienia*, in *Przekrój* (March 2020) <<https://przekroj.pl/artykuly/felietony/lekcje-wspolistnienia-julia-fiedorczuk>>

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